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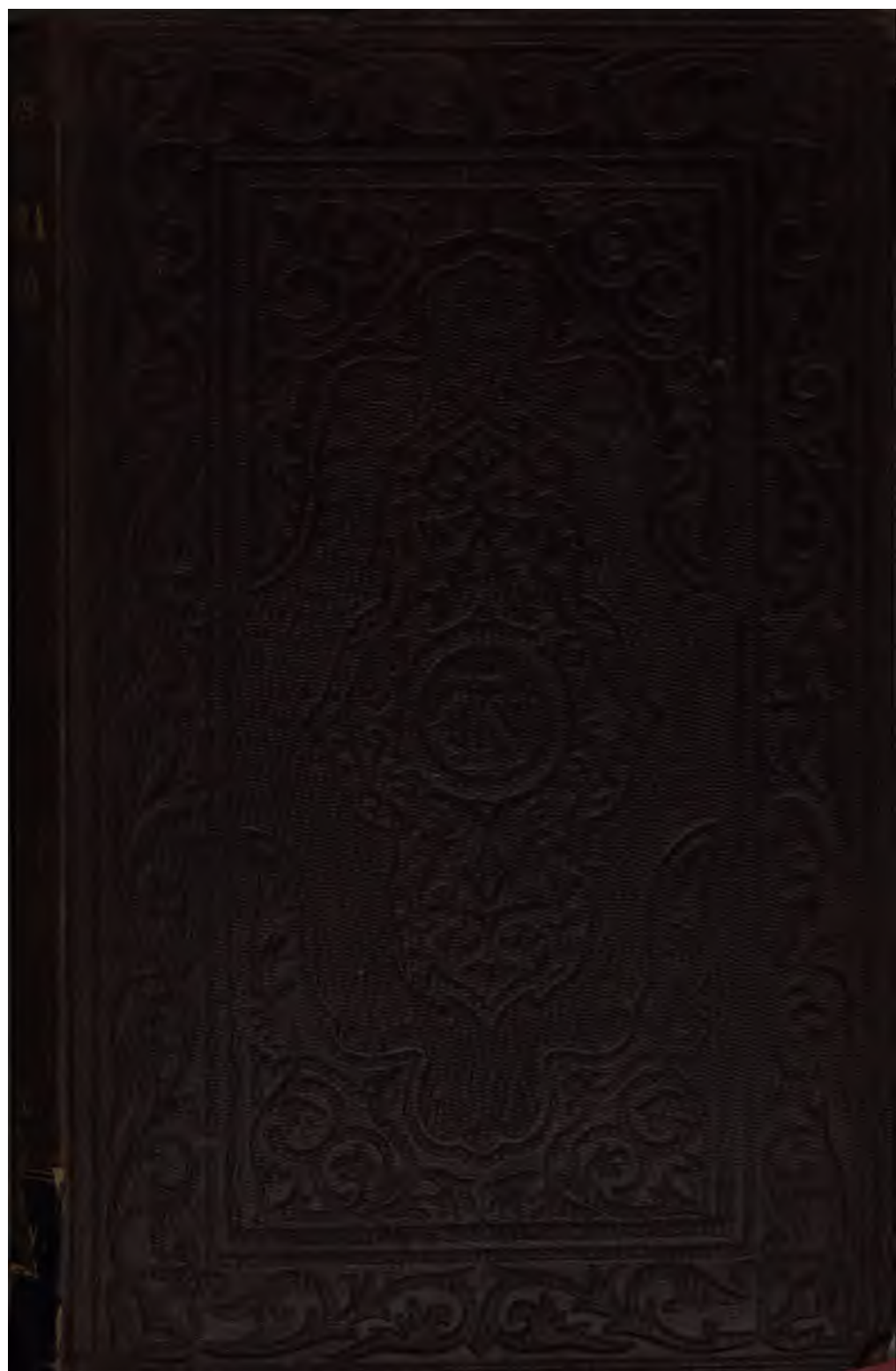
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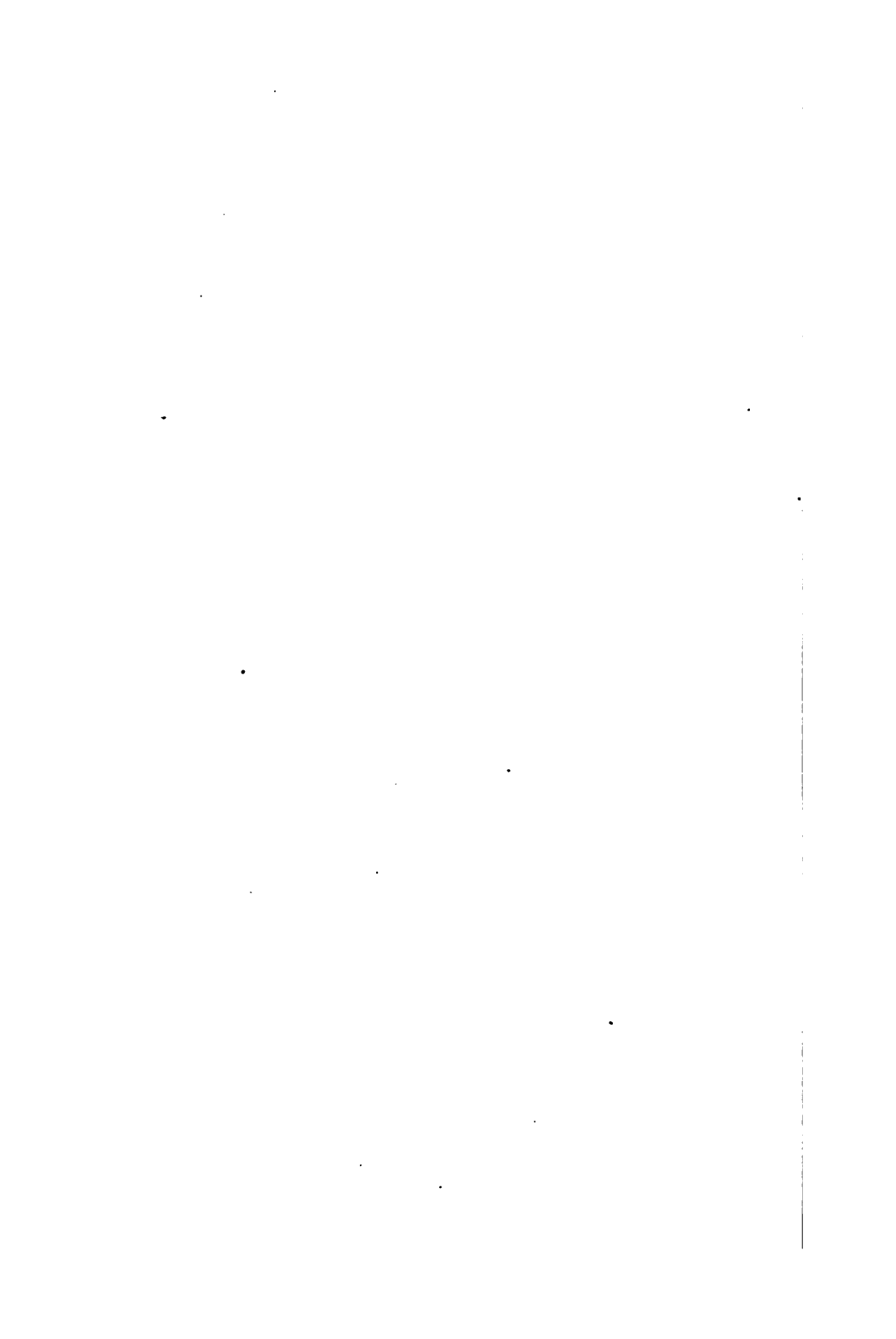
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LEONORA D'ORCO.

CHAPTER I.

"BRING lights," said Lorenzo to a girl who appeared as the song concluded; and he sighed as if some sweet dream had been broken and passed away. "Oh! music—music such as that is indeed divine."

"Ay," answered the singer "music is divine and so is poetry—so sculpture, painting, architecture. Every art, every science that raises man from his primitive brutality has a portion of divinity about it; for it elevates toward the Creator. Christ has said, 'be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven

is perfect;' and though we can not reach perfection, we may strain for it.

"Nor, as some have supposed, do the arts render effeminate. They may soften the manners, as the old Roman says, but not the character. On the contrary, all that tends to exercise tends to strengthen. It is idleness, it is luxury which enfeebles. Athens in her highest pride of art was in her highest pride of power, and her artists learned by the pencil or the chisel to put on the buckler and to grasp the sword. And what does the combination of art and science do? What has it done, and what will it not do?"

He gazed up for a moment like one inspired, and then added, "God knows, for in extent and majesty the results are beyond even our dreams. But I ever see the times afar when the yet undeveloped powers of man and nature shall work miracles—when mountains shall be moved or forced from side to side to smooth the path of our race, and bring nation closer to nation—when the very elements shall become

subservient to the will of man, and when the energies of his nature, directed by science, shall no longer be squandered in war and bloodshed, but shall render war impossible, and bloodshed, under whatever name, a crime.

“Oh peace, how beautiful art thou! Oh goodness, how wide and comprehensive ought to be thy reign! Angel of love, thou art the seraphim nearest to the throne of God! So help me Heaven, I would not kill the smallest bird that flutters from spray to spray, nor tread upon a beetle in my path!”

There was something so exquisitely sweet in his voice, so sublime in his look, so marvellously graceful in his manner, that the two young lovers, while they gazed and listened, could almost have fancied him the angel of love whom he apostrophized. They sat silent when he paused, listening eagerly for more; but when he began to speak again, all was changed except that captivating power which seemed to command the assent or overrule

the judgment of all who heard him. His mood was now changed, and nothing could be more light and playful than his talk, till the door was opened and another mood came over him.

"Ah, Catarina," he said to the girl who tardily brought in the lights, "if the world waits upon you for illumination, we shall have another dark age upon us. Now see what it is: this little candle in a moment brings out of obscurity a thousand things which would not be discerned before. Thus it is in this world, Catarina; we group our twilight way among things unseen till comes some light of science, and we find ourselves surrounded by multitudes of beautiful things we could not before discern. Do you understand me, Catarina?"

"No, signor," answered the girl, opening her great black eyes, "but I love to hear you speak, even when I know not what you are speaking of."

"*How can she understand such things?*" asked

Leonora. "Probably she has never been out of the village."

"And she is wise not to go," answered the stranger. "What would she gain by going, to what she might lose? Do you love the cultivation of flowers, sweet lady? If so, you will know that there be some which love the shade and will not bear transplanting. That poor girl, right happy here, with youth, and health, and a sufficiency of all things, might be very miserable in a wider scene. Oh no, God's will is best. We should never pray for anything but grace and peace. I cannot but think that prayers—important, short-sighted prayers—are sometimes granted in chastisement. There is one eye alone which sees the consequence of all things. There may be poison in a cup of nectar; but you cannot so well conceal the venom in a draught of pure water from the well. Let the poor girl stay here. Now sit you still, and I will draw you both, one for the other; but talk at will; I would not have you dull and silent. Any bungler can draw the body.

I want to sketch the spirit likewise. Eyes, nose, and mouth are easily drawn; the heart and the soul require a better pencil. Ay, now you are smiling again. You were all too grave just now."

"But your discourse has been very serious," replied Lorenzo. "Some things might well puzzle, some sadden us."

"Tis well," said the artist gravely, "to prompt thought, and I sought to do it. You two were dreaming when first I saw you. I have but awakened you. I know not your names nor your history; but you are both very young; and when the Jove-born goddess took on bodily the part of Mentor, she knew that youth and inexperience require an almost superhuman monitor. I can give no such counsels, but every man can bring a little cool water where he sees a fire. Ah! lady, would I had my colors here to catch that rosy blush before it flies."

"Fie! fie!" she answered, "or you will make me fly also. You cannot suppose that

either Lorenzo or I would wish or do aught that is wrong. Your admonitions were cast away upon us, for we needed them not."

"God knows," said the artist, laughing, "but neither you nor I, young lady. Your speech is not Florentine, but his is: how comes that? Is he carrying home a bride?"

"The difference of our speech is soon explained," said Lorenzo, "though we are both of the same land. But she has ever lived in Lombardy. I have travelled far and wide, but my youth was all spent in Florence. I came there when I was very young, and remained till the death of Lorenzo de Medici, whose godson I am."

"Then you are Lorenzo Visconti," said the artist; "but who is this?" and he pointed toward Leonora with the end of his pencil.

"You divine," answered the young man without noticing his question; "are you skilled in the black art among all your other learning, signor?"

"I am really skilled in very little," replied their companion. "In a life neither very long nor very short, but one of much labour and much study, I have never produced one work—nay, done one thing with which I was wholly satisfied. The man who places his estimate of excellence very high may surpass his contemporaries, and yet fall far short of his own conceptions. Hereafter men may speak of me well or ill, as they please. If ill, their censure will not hurt me; if well, their faintest applause will go beyond my own. As to the black art, Signor Lorenzo, the blackest arts are not those of the magician; yet many things seem magical which are very simple. Lorenzo de Medici had but one Lombard godson; and I remember you well, now, when you were a little boy in Florence. The only marvel is that I ever forgot you. But you have not introduced me to this lady."

"Nay, I know not whom to introduce," answered the young man.

"Ah! you have entangled me in my own net," said the artist. "Well it is right you should both know who it is gives counsels unsought, and teaches lessons perhaps unneeded. A good many years ago there lived in Florence a poor gentleman named Ser Pietro da Vinci. His means were small, but he had great capacity, though he turned it to but little account. His taste for art was great, however, and he frequented the houses of the best painters and sculptors in Italy.

"Well, he had a son, a wild, fitful boy, who studied everything, attempted much, and perfected little. He plunged into arithmetic, mathematics, geometry, and used to find a good deal of fun in puzzling his masters with hard questions. Again, he would work untaught in clay, and make heads of children and of laughing women; and again he would sing his own rude verses to the lute, or sketch the figures and faces of all who came near him.

"This was all when he was very young—a mere boy, indeed; but among his father's

friends was the well-known Andrea Verrocchio, the great painter; and in his bottega was soon found the boy, studying hard, and only now and then giving way to his wild moods by darting away from his painting, sometimes to some sister art, sometimes to something directly opposite. He drew plans for houses, churches, fortresses; he devised instruments of war, projected canals, laid out new roads, sung to his lute, danced at the village festivals, studied medicine and anatomy.

"But his fancies and designs went beyond the common notions of the day; men treated them as whims impossible of execution, projects beyond the strength of man to complete. His drawings, and his paintings, and his sculpture, however, they admired, patted him on the head, and called him the young genius.

"At length he was set to paint part of a picture which his master had commenced, and the result was that Verrocchio threw away his pallet, declaring he would never paint more, as he had been excelled by a boy. That

boy went on to win money and fame till people began to call him Maestro, and the wild little boy became Maestro Leonardo da Vinci, who, some say, is a great painter. By that name, Signor Lorenzo, you may introduce me to the lady, for my sketches are now finished."

The love for art in Italy at that time approached adoration; the name of Leonarda da Vinci was famous from the foot of the Alps to the Straits of Messina, and Leonora took the great painter's hand and kissed it with as much veneration as if he had been her patron saint.

"Ah! and so this is the fair Signora d'Orco?" said Leonardo. "Now I understand it all. You are travelling to join your father. I met with him at Bologna as I passed."

"How long ago was that, Maestro Leonardo?" asked Leonora, with some surprise.

"It was some days since," replied the painter, "and he must be in Rome by this time."

The lovers looked inquiringly into each other's

faces, and after a moment's thought, Lorenzo said:

"We expected to overtake him at Bologna. His letters led us to believe we should find him there; but doubtless he has left directions for our guidance."

"Perhaps so," replied Leonardo, in a somewhat sombre and doubtful tone; "but, if you do not find such directions, what will you do?"

"We can but go on, I suppose," answered Leonora; "Lorenzo must march with the French army, which directs its course to Rome, and I cannot be left without some one to protect me."

The painter shook his head gravely.

"Far better, my child," he said, "that you should remain in Bologna. The ways are dangerous; Rome is no fit place for you. Besides, your father has gone thither, I am told, on affairs of much importance, and you wou'd be but a burden to him. He goes, they told me, to hold a conference with Cardinal Cæsar Borgia,

who seeks a man of great skill and resolution to hold in check the somewhat turbulent and discontented inhabitants of the territories in Romagna, bestowed upon him by his father, Pope Alexander. Go not after him to Rome, but by his express desire. I will give you a letter to the Abbess Manzuoli, in Bologna, who will be a mother to you for the time you have to stay."

"All must be decided by my father's will," replied Leonora; "but I thank you much, Signor da Vinci, for the promised letter, which cannot but be of service to me in case of need."

"Well then," replied the great painter, changing his tone, "come round here, and look over my shoulder. Here are the two portraits. Did you ever see two uglier people? Is he not frightful, Signora Leonora? and as to her face and figure, they are, of course, hideous, Lorenzo."

Leonora took the rapid sketch, which represented Lorenzo with a drawn sword in one

hand and a banner in the other, looking up to a cloudy sky, through which broke a brighter gleam of light, gazed at it a moment with what may well be called ecstasy, and then placed it in the scarf which covered her bosom, while he pressed his lips upon the other paper in silent delight.

"You need not do that, Lorenzo," said the painter, with a quiet smile; "your lips will soil my picture—my picture will soil your lips. There are others near where the paint will not come off, for they are limned by a hand divine. But are you both satisfied?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Leonora, joyfully; but Lorenzo answered at once, "No, unless you will promise me, Signor da Vinci, to paint me a portrait of her, as you can only paint, I can not be satisfied."

"When she is your wife," answered Leonardo, "you have but to write to me that Mona Leonora Visconti will sit, and be I at the distance of two hundred leagues, I will come. But now, I will hie me to the little chamber they have

given me, and write the letter I spoke of, and then return. Perchance the lady may have retired ere then, but I shall find you here, Lorenzo. Is it not so?"

"Assuredly," replied the young man; "I have to visit the guards, and see that all is rightly disposed in the town; but I will not go till you return."

I will not follow the indiscreet example of Leonardo, and try to sketch them as they sat alone after his departure. Indeed, it were not an easy task. They were very happy, and happiness is like the chameleon, ever changing its hues. An hour and a half, or a moment; for such it seemed to them, had passed when old Mona Mariana, on whose discreet and reasonable forbearance be a benediction, put her head into the room, and said, in a sleepy tone:

"Is it not time for rest, dear lady?"

"You seem to think so Mariana, for you are half asleep already."

"Ah, young hearts! young hearts!" said the old lady, who had slept for several hours; "they

have thoughts enough to keep them waking, and strength to bear it. Old people have only to pray and sleep. But, indeed, you had better come to rest; we have all to rise betimes."

After a word or two more, Leonora parted from her lover, and soon seeking her bed, lay down and dreamed, but not asleep.

As if the painter had heard her light foot on the stairs, she had not been gone a minute when Leonardo appeared. He took Lorenzo's hand eagerly in his, and said, in a low, earnest tone:

"Let her not go to Rome, I beseech you, young gentleman—let her not go to Rome."

"And why are you so eager she should not go there?" asked Lorenzo, somewhat surprised, and even alarmed by his new friend's manner. "Is there any danger?"

"Every danger," answered Da Vinci.

"Why?"

"For a thousand reasons, but they are difficult to explain. Yet stay; I remember rapping a fellow student's knuckles to prevent his putting



his profane hand on a bunch of beautiful grapes, all covered with their vineyard bloom, when I was about to paint them. This young lovely girl—this Signora d'Orco, is like one of those grapes, rich in the bloom of innocence. There is the sweet fruit within—there is, or is to come the ardent wine of love and passion, but the bloom is there still. Oh, let it not be brushed away too soon, Lorenzo! Now listen: Rome is a place of horror and vice. In the chair of the Apostle sits the incarnation of every sin and crime. The example is too widely, too eagerly followed by people ever ready to learn. The very air is pollution. The very ground is foul. Would you take her into a pest-house? But more, still more—nay, what shall I say? How shall I say it? Her father—her very father has been gained by the foulest of the foul offspring of Borgia. Ramiro d'Orco is now the bosom counsellor of Cæsar, who, in a shorter space of time than it took his great namesake to make himself master of the Roman State, has accumulated more vices,—committed more

crimes than any man now living, or that ever lived."

"But how have they gained him? Why have they sought him?" asked Lorenzo. "He is himself wealthy; his daughter is more so. They cannot approach him by mercenary means: and then, why should they seek a man who has no political power?"

"A tale long to tell, an intrigue difficult to explain," replied Da Vinci. "I can show you why and how, in a few words indeed; but if you must seek proofs of what I say, you may have to buy them dearly. Listen then to them, Lorenzo Visconti. Men seek that which they have not. Money might not tempt Ramiro d'Orco. The prospect of that political power which he does not possess has tempted him. They have promised him what I may well call prefectal power in one half of Romagna, and he has yielded. What would he not sacrifice for that? His own honor—perhaps his child's. Thus your first question is answered. Thus they have approached and gained him.

“Now to your second question, Why they have sought him? The first motive was to control, or, rather to restrain and mollify the bitterest and now most powerful enemy of the house of Borgia. Do you know that he is nearly related to the family of Rovera? that he is not only first cousin, but schoolfellow and playmate of that famous cardinal, Julian de Rovera, whose enmity to Alexander and to Cæsar is so strong that, were it at the peril of his own life and the disorder of all Christendom, he would attempt to hurl the present pontiff from his seat, and has already branded the head of the Church with all the infamies that can disgrace a man, much more a priest—ambition, avarice, fraud, heresy, adultery, murder?

“With him, who now journeys with the King of France, Alexander and his bastard hope to negotiate, and to mollify him through the intercession of Ramiro d'Orco, the only one on earth who has influence worth consideration with the stern Cardinal Julian. This is why they seek him. There are many other motives,

but this is enough. Take her not to Rome, young man. Listen to the counsel of one who can have no object but your good and hers. If you do not listen you are responsible for all the results."

"I fear not that any thing can make her aught but what she is," replied Lorenzo with all the proud enthusiasm of young love. "Better, nobler she cannot be, and as the foulest breath can not sully the diamond, so can no foul atmosphere tarnish her purity."

A faint smile fluttered for a single instant round the lips of Da Vinci; but he resumed his serious aspect instantly—nay, his countenance was more grave and stern than before.

"Doubtless," he said, "doubtless; for they who study much the human face, learn to read it as a book; and hers is a beautiful page—clear, and pure, and bright. But there are arts, young man, you know not of—drugs of terrible power, which lull the spirit into a sleep like that of death, and leave the body im-

potent for resistance or defence. Nay, violence itself—course, brutal violence, may be dreaded in a place—”

“They dare not!” exclaimed Lorenzo, fiercely, “they dare not!”

“What dare not a Borgia do?” asked Leonardo. “When they have set at naught every tie, moral and religious—when they have made crime their pastime, vice their solace, poison and murder their means—provoked to the utmost, without a fear, the wrath of man and the vengeance of God—what dare not the Borgias do? And what could be your vengeance, that they should fear it?”

“But her father,” said Lorenzo, “her father!”

An expression almost sublime came upon the great painter’s countenance, and he answered, in a tone of stern warning,

“Trust not to her father. His God is not our God! There are things so abhorrent to the first pure, honest principles which Nature has

planted in the hearts of the young, that it is too dreadful a task to open innocent eyes to their existence. But mark me, Lorenzo Visconti, there have been men who have sold their children for money. Ambition is a still fiercer passion than avarice. I have done. My task is performed, and I may say no more than this: take her not to Rome: let her not set foot in it, if you can prevent it."

"I will not—no, I will not," replied the young man, thoughtfully. "I will prevent it—nay, it might be wise to acquire a right to prevent it."

"Never do a wrong to attain what you judge right," answered Da Vinci. "And now good-night. You have your posts to look to; a calm walk beneath the moon, with thought for your companion, will do you good."

Lorenzo pressed his hand and they parted.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was a little monticule by the road side just on the Tuscan frontier. At the distance of about three quarters of a mile in front was the small fortified town of Vivizano with its citadel, seeming strong and capable of defence; but the walls were old, especially those of the town, and along the flat, and apparently perpendicular faces of the curtain, the goats, unconscious of danger, were walking quietly along, browsing on those fresh shoots of the caper plant, which frequently appear during a benign autumn. At a distance it seemed that there was not footing even for a goat, but the presence of those animals showed the mortar to have been worn out between the stones; and

at one spot the keen eye of Lorenzo Visconti perceived three or four of the bearded beasts of the mountain gathered together as if in conclave. He marked the fact well, for he had learned that nothing should escape a soldier's notice.

He and his party had taken up their position on the little hill in consequence of orders received from the main body, which was coming up rapidly, and no opposition having yet been met with in the course of the march, Leonora and her women sat on their horses and mules beside him, little anticipating any danger.

"It looks a beautiful old place, Lorenzo," said Leonora; "at least at this distance, though one cannot tell what it may be within. But what made the king order you to halt here as soon as you came in sight of the town, instead of marching on as before?"

"I cannot tell," replied her lover, "unless, dear girl, it is that I sent last night to know if I might fall back to confer with your severe relation, the Cardinal Julian de Rovera as to the

journey to Bologna. The roads may part here. Do you not see that yellow streak running away through the meadows, and then skirting the foot of the mountain? That may be the high way to Bologna perhaps. The king is always kind and considerate."

"Jesu Maria!" cried Madonna Mariana, "what's that?"

The moment before she spoke a flash, sudden and bright, glanced along a part of the old wall, and after a second or two the loud boom of one of the cannons of those days burst upon the ear. Hardly had it ceased when a ball came whizzing by, and ploughed up the earth some fifty yards behind them, and at about the same distance on the right.

"By heavens! they have fired a falconet at us," exclaimed Lorenzo. "Back, back, dear Leonora; you and your women ride to that cottage behind the point of rock. Nay, delay not, beloved. I will send some men to keep guard."

"I am not afraid," replied Leonora, with a

smile, leaning over towards him, and looking up in his face. "Am I not to be a soldier's bride, Lorenzo?" I must accustom myself to the sound of cannon. Those good people must fire better ere they frighten me."

"But they frighten me, dear lady," cried Mariana. "Oh, come back, come back! I am sure they fired well enough to come so near us."

"Oh, come back! come back!" cried all the maids in chorus.

"Well, go—go," answered Leonora; "I will join you in a moment or two. I want to see them take another shot."

The women waited for no further permission, but hurried off with all speed, and Lorenzo was still engaged in persuading Leonora to follow them, when a small troop of men-at-arms came galloping up the pass. At their head was De Terrail.

"Halt—halt here, and form upon the company of the *Seigneur di Visconti*," cried the young Bayard. "My lord, I bear the king's orders to

you to advance no further, but to wait for his personal presence. He thought, indeed, you had gone farther than he had commanded when he heard that shot. It was a cannon, was it not?"

"A cannon, and not badly aimed for the first shot," replied Lorenzo; "there is the furrow the ball made."

"For God's sake send the lady to a place of safety," cried Bayard; "what are you thinking of, my friend?"

"I cannot persuade her to go," replied Lorenzo.

"Well, I will—I will," answered Leonora, turning her horse's head. "Farewell, Lorenzo; win fame for your lady's sake—yet be not rash."

Something bright glistened in her eye; and she turned to the cottage where her women had already taken refuge. A small guard was then stationed at the door, and the trumpets of the cavalry were already heard blowing through the pass, but still Lorenzo and his friend had time

to exchange a few words before the head of the array appeared.

"What is the king going to do?" asked Lorenzo.

"Attack the town and take it," replied De Terrail. "On my soul, these Tuscans are rather bold to make a stand in such a place as that. But they have good bombadiers it would seem. That ball came far and well."

"Who leads the attack?" asked Lorenzo. "Was anything settled when you came away?"

"Nothing fixed," answered Bayard; "but I fear it will all be left to the Gascons and the Swiss. They are all infantry, you know, and if the place is to be taken by a *coup de main* they must do it, and we support them. The popguns* they carry, it is supposed, will do everything."

"Out upon their popguns!" cried Lorenzo. "Good faith, I trust the King will let us have

* Paul Jovius describes these guns—the embryo musket—amongst the arms of the Swiss infantry, which did such good service in the campaign against Naples. They were at first looked upon with great contempt by the men-at-arms.

our share; it is my right, I think. I have led during the whole march, and I have heard say, he who does so, is privileged to make the first charge."

"But what would you do?" asked Bayard. "You would not charge those stone walls would you?"

"No," replied the other; "but I would dismount my men, take none but volunteers, and lead them as *enfants perdu*. If the king will but consent, I will undertake to carry that place sword in hand, or, at least, be as soon in as any one."

Another shot from the walls, coming still nearer than the preceding ball, interrupted their conversation, and before it could be renewed, the Gascon infantry began to debouche from the path and deploy to the left. Then came the Swiss infantry, and then a body of cavalry, under the Count d'Entragues. All was glitter and display, shining arms, waving banners, nodding plumes, lances and pikes, arquebusses, crossbows, halberts, surcoats of silk and cloth of

gold and silver; but what most struck the eyes of the two young soldiers was the admirable array of the Swiss infantry, as every movement and evolution was performed. No rank was broken, no disorder appeared, but shoulder to shoulder, man treading in the step of man, they marched, they wheeled, they deployed, as if the body of which they formed a part was one of those machines which change their form continually at the will of those who manage them, without ever losing their solidity.

At length appeared the magnificent escort of the king, who immediately rode up to the little hill on which Lorenzo was posted, and gazed forward towards the town, while two more shot from the walls were heard, and a slight agitation among the Gascon infantry on the left, told that this time some effect had followed.

At the king's first appearance, Lorenzo had sprung to the ground, and approached his stirrup, but he suffered him to gaze over the scene uninterrupted, till Charles turned his eyes upon him, and said:

"Well, what has happened, my young lord?"

"Nothing, sire, but that they have fired a few shots at us from the walls. I beseech your Majesty, as I have led all the way, to let me have my place in the attack. I would fain lead still, if you will permit me to dismount my men, and I think I will shew you that gentlemen-at-arms can take a place as well as foot soldiers. I have marked a spot where I will undertake to force an entrance."

"Where? where?" asked the monarch eagerly.

"I cannot well point it out, sire," replied the young man; "but I can find it if you will permit me."

The king looked round to the superior officers about him, saying in a hesitating tone:

"It is contrary to the order we proposed. What say you, La Tremouille?"

"Why, Sire, there must be *enfants perdu* either taken from the Gascons or some other," replied the great commander.

"Let him go—let him go!" cried De Vitry,

gaily; "if the youth will wager his life against his spurs, why let him go, sire."

"Support him by the Swiss, and the Swiss by some men-at-arms, to guard against a sortie, and let him go in God's name," added La Tremouille. "Make haste, Visconti! Select your men well, and call for some ladders from the rear."

"Better summon the place first," said the king.

"It is the rule, sire, and should be done," answered the other; "but methinks these good people imagine they have been summoned already by the answers they send from their walls. There they go again! By my life they are aiming at the royal banner. Pity the artillery is so far behind, or we would answer them in kind. From that youth's eye, however, I think we shall have no need of bombards. He has spied some advantage, I will stake my life."

A trumpet was accordingly sent forward, and was suffered to approach close to the walls; but he returned with the answer that the garrison

was strong, had been placed there by the Signoria of Florence, and could not consent to surrender without a stroke struck. In fact, they saw that no artillery was present at the time with the king's army, and did not believe the place could be taken without a breach being made.

In the meantime Lorenzo had addressed a few words to his troop, asking who would accompany him to lead the attack. Such was the confidence he had gained during the march that every man sprung to the ground and professed himself ready, even to the lowest castelier. Only fifty, however, were selected, and the rest ordered to remain with the horses. Some scaling ladders were procured, and all was ready to advance when the trumpet returned. A short pause ensued, and then was heard the beat of the drum.

Lorenzo sprang forward; his men came rapidly after, bearing the ladders horizontally; and the Swiss followed with an interval of some fifty yards. A strong body of Gascons, with petards directed their course towards one of the

gates of the town; and a battalion of Swiss moved towards a postern which had been discovered in the curtain. But Lorenzo was before them all, and lost not an inch of ground. Straight towards what seemed to the eye of the king the most inaccessible spot of the fortress he bent his way, taking advantage of every undulation of the ground to shelter his men from the cannon balls, which now came somewhat faster than at first, till he arrived within fifty paces of the spot where he had marked the goats climbing and standing. There in a little ravine, which the guns, as they were planted on the walls, could not bear upon, he turned for one moment to the men, exclaiming:

“Here, gentlemen, I have seen the goats go up and down, and surely we can do so too. The lowest part is the most difficult. The ladders—the ladders to the front; now, on with a rush!”

All were active, all were strong. The ditch, then dry, was speedily reached; and the ladders raised. They were too short to approach the

summit of the wall, but Lorenzo's keen eye had not deceived him. Where he had seen the goats gathered together several huge stones had fallen; and, from that spot, there was a clear but narrow pathway up. At first it seemed as if he would meet but small resistance; for attacked in three quarters and divided in opinion amongst themselves, the superior officers of the Florentine garrison were consulting together whether it would not be better to hang out a white flag and treat for a surrender. But speedily, soldiers came running along the platform above, hand guns and cross bows were pointed at the ascending party, and large stones were cast down upon their heads. It was too late to treat now: the attack had fully commenced, the struggle was for life or death, and the defenders fought with the energy of despair.

In the meantime there were many and varying feelings in and around the cottage above where Leonora and her women had taken refuge. Fear—for with all the personal courage she had shown, and with an eager longing for his renown,

the young girl still felt for her lover's safety. Fear and hope and anxious expectations succeeded each other in Leonora's bosom, like the changing aspects of a dream. Now she saw him in imagination mangled and bleeding in the fight: now beheld him carrying the banner of France triumphantly over the worsted foe: now fancied him still detained with the cavalry on the hill, and fretting at inaction.

"Run out—run out, Antonio!" she cried after bearing the struggle in her heart for some time, "see what has become of your lord, and let me know if he be still on the hill."

"Certainly, Signora, if you desire it," answered the other, "although, thank Heaven, I am one of God's peaceable creatures, and love not cannon balls more than my neighbours, yet, where not more than one man out of five hundred is likely to be hit during a whole day, I may take my chance for five minutes without gaining the evil reputation of a fighting man."

He went out as he spoke, but stayed more than the five minutes; for to say the truth, he

soon became interested in the scene, as he beheld the three bodies of French troops moving down to the assault. He could not, it is true, discover to which body his young lord was attached, but he saw clearly enough that he had left the hill. The horses and the men not engaged had moved towards the rear out of cannon shot, and the little monticule was now occupied only by the king, his Scottish archers and several of his counsellors and immediate attendants.

After watching for a few moments, Antonio glided in amongst the horses till he reached the side of young Bayard, and pulling his surcoat, he said, "Seignor de Terrail, will you tell me where Signor Visconti is?"

"There!" answered Bayard pointing with his hand, "he is leading the centre attack at the head of the forlorn hope."

"God shield us!" exclaimed Antonio, "is he fool enough to plunge into forlorn hopes, when he has got such warm ones in that cottage there?"

"Ah, I had forgot the lady," replied de Terrail, "she must doubtless be anxious."

"Ay, as anxious as a hen who sees her brood of ducklings venture into a pond," answered Antonio.

"Tell her I will come and bring her news from time to time," replied Bayard, "a lady's fears are to be revered, my good friend, especially when she nobly sends her lover to the field with strengthening words. Go, and say all goes well, and I will come and bear her tidings."

Thus saying, while Antonio turned back to the cottage, the young hero fixed his eyes upon the small party of his friend and never lost sight but for a moment or two, when some irregularity of the ground or the masses of the Swiss infantry interposed, of the surcoat of violet and gold, which Lorenzo wore that day.

"They are nearing the wall," said the King aloud, "God send the youth has not deceived himself; but he will be there before the others reach the gates."

"Look, sire, there is a rush!" cried La Tremouille.

"He has got three ladders up by Heaven!" exclaimed de Vitry, "now God speed you, brave heart!"

The Swiss quickened their pace to support, and as they poured in over the rise in the ground hid the *enfants perdus* from sight, and all for a moment or two seemed confusion, while the defenders upon the walls alone appeared distinctly, hurling down masses of stone, and firing upon the assailants from every embrasure. At length, however, a figure appeared on the top of one of the ladders, carrying a banner in his left hand. He sprang, as it appeared at that distance, straight against the side of the wall. But he gained footing there; and then bounded up towards the summit. Another, and another followed; but still the banner bearer was the first; and at length, though surrounded evidently by a crowd of foes, he stood firm upon the parapet and waved the flag proudly in the air, while a gleam of sunshine broke through the cloud of

smoke and shone upon the surcoat of violet and gold.

"Visconti for a thousand crowns!" cried Bayard enthusiastically, "he is first in, he has won the town!"

"Are you sure it is he?" demanded the king.

"Certain, sire," replied De Terrail, "I have kept my eye on him all the time. I can see his surcoat distinctly."

"Oh yes, it is he;" said La Tremouille, "the Swiss are pouring up after. The place is taken, and see they have forced the south gate. But Visconti is first in. His be the *los*!"

"Your pardon for a moment, sire," said Bayard, "but by your leave I will carry the tidings to yon cottage behind the angle of the rock. The Signora Leonora d'Orco is waiting anxious there for tidings. She sent Lorenzo forth with the words, 'Win fame for your lady's sake.'"

"And he has won it like a paladin," cried Charles, whom every thing that smacked of ancient chivalry kindled quickly into a glow. "In truth did she say so? 'Twas like a noble

lady. Shame is me, I had forgotten her in this unexpected resistance. Carry her this ring from me, De Terrail, tell her that Lorenzo has won the town and a pair of spurs this day."

"And mind, De Terrail," cried de Vitry "that you kiss her hand when you put the ring on her finger. By my faith it is worth kissing, though I know one still fairer than that."

"Lucky Lorenzo!" thought Bayard as he rode away; but never was man so little envious of another's good fortune, and though he could not but regret that he had not been permitted to take part in the assault, no jealousy of his friend mingled with the sigh that he gave to his own ill luck.

"All goes well—all goes well, Signora," he cried as he approached the cottage door at which Leonora was standing. "Visconti has stormed the town and taken it!"

"Lorenzo—my Lorenzo!" exclaimed Leonora, "so young—he storm the town!"

"He did, dear lady," replied Bayard, "he scaled the walls, he was first upon the parapet.

I saw him myself with his banderol in his hand before another soldier entered. The king saw him too, and has sent you this ring, for we all know that it was your love and your words that gave him strength and valor to do all he has done this day."

Leonora could bear no more joy, and she bent down her head and wept, while Bayard gently put the ring upon her finger adding, "His Majesty bade me tell you that Lorenzo has won the town and a pair of spurs this day."

"Then he is well—then he is uninjured?" said Leonora.

"He may have a scratch or two perhaps," replied Bayard, "but he can have no serious hurt if I may judge by the way he waved the banderol on the wall when he had gained it."

"Thank God for that also," said the beautiful girl, "but here, if I mistake not, comes his Majesty himself."

As she spoke, followed by some half dozen of his guard, and accompanied by an elderly man in the scarlet robes of the highest clerical rank,

the monarch rode slowly up and dismounted at the cottage door.

"There is no more to be seen there" he said, approaching Leonora, "the banner of France floats over every tower and gate. So now, fair lady, I have time to pay my knightly devoirs to you; and moreover to introduce you to a near relation who tells me he has not seen you since you were a child. This is the Cardinal Julian de Rovera."

Leonora made a low obeisance to the king, in whose sweet and somewhat suffering face she saw a spirit of kindness and generous feeling that encouraged her, but knelt before the Cardinal and reverently kissed his hand. His was a harsh though handsome countenance, and there was a flash in his dark eye which seemed to betoken a fiery and passionate nature.

"Rise, rise my child," said he good humoredly enough. "I was much surprised, when a few nights ago, I joined his Majesty of France, to hear that you were journeying with so young cavalier as this Lorenzo Visconti."

"It was by my father's express command, your Eminence," replied Leonora, "and besides, as you see, I have not only my own women with me, but also Mona Mariana here, a person of discreet age, sent with me by your uncle the Count."

A slight smile, unperceived by the Cardinal, passed across the sweet lips of the beautiful girl, as she thought of the amount of Mariana's discretion.

"Well, well, that is all right," said the hasty Cardinal, "and how has he comported himself towards you, this young lord?"

"With all care and kindness," answered Leonora.

"Ay doubtless," he answered, "but with reverence too I hope—sought to do you no wrong?"

The colour came up into Leonora's cheek but it was evidently not the blush of shame.

"Lorenzo Visconti is incapable of doing wrong to any one, my Lord Cardinal," she said, "and were he not, the last one, methinks, he would seek to wrong, is his promised wife."

"Ay, and has it gone as far as that?" said

the Cardinal, "pray is this with your father's knowledge."

"With his knowledge and his full consent, my lord," replied Leonora, not a little offended at his close questions and harsh manner before so many witnesses. It must indeed be recollected that Ramiro d'Orco, though cold in manner towards his child, had left her almost to the guidance of her own will, before we can judge of the feelings created by Julian's assumption of authority.

"Well, it is all well, I suppose," replied the old man, "and now, Signora, can you tell me what it is your young protector wants to say to me. Doubtless, you know he wrote to his Majesty, here present, requesting to be permitted to fall back in order to confer with me."

"He sought your counsel and directions, my lord," replied Leonora, "the course of the army had been changed, and marched by Parma instead of Bologna. My father had also gone on from Bologna, where I was to have joined him, to Rome, which Lorenzo thought not a fit

place for me, and there were many other reasons which he can explain better than I can, why he thought you, sir—reverend as you are, by life and profession, should be consulted as soon as we heard you were near.”

A well-pleased smile came upon the face of the old man, “That is, as it should be,” he said in a much mollified tone, “this young Lorenzo, my child, seems, as I have heard he is, a youth of great discretion and judgment. You must not think my questions hard; they spring from regard for Ramiro’s child. I will see your young lover and talk with him more.”

While this conversation had been passing between the Cardinal of St. Peters and Leonora, the young King of France had cast himself upon one of the cottage settles, and was speaking quietly with the Duke of Montpensier, D’Entragues and some other officers who had come with him; but he had heard several of the questions of the Cardinal, and he now joined in saying, “You estimate too lightly, my lord Cardinal, the chivalry of our French knights. Lorenzo

Visconti has been brought up at our court, and when a beautiful lady like this is entrusted to his charge, he looks upon her by the laws of chivalry as a sacred relic which he has to bear to some distant shrine."

"No reason for his not kissing the relic," said de Vitry, in a low tone, "indeed, it were but a becoming act of devotion—but who comes here running like a deer?—One of your Majesty's pages; now God send nothing has gone wrong."

"What is it, Martin de Lourdes," asked the king as the boy bounded up.

"There is a horseman coming at full speed from the town, sire," said the youth, "he looks like the Seigneur de Visconti, and Monsieur de la Tremouille, thought it best to let you know."

"But Lorenzo had dismounted," said the King, "his horse, with the rest of the troop are up the pass there."

"He could easily find one in the town, sire," said Montpensier. But while they were discussing

the matter, Lorenzo himself rode up, and dismounted a few steps from the spot where the King was seated. His surcoat was rent and torn; his crest and helmet hacked with blows, and in one place dented in; but there was no blood or sign of injury about him, and his face was flushed with haste and excitement.

"The town is taken, sire," he said, "but I grieve to say there is no restraining the soldiery. Not only do the rabble of Swiss and Gascons give no quarter to armed men; but they are killing and plundering the unarmed and defenceless."

"Let them kill! let them kill, Visconti!" said the Count D'Entragues. "You must be accustomed to such sights."

"I beseech you, sire, send down a company of men-at-arms, and put a stop to this cruel disorder?"

"They deserve punishment for daring to hold out an untenable place," said the young King, sternly, "such is the law of arms; is it not Montpensier?"

"Assuredly, sire," replied the Duke, "no one can claim quarter as a right in a town taken by assault, and if the attempt is made to resist when the place is notoriously untenable; the strict law condemns everyone of the garrison to the cord. I should judge, however, that by this time the slaughter has gone far enough to strike terror into the other towns before us. It might, therefore, be as well to send down a few lancers to keep the infantry in order."

"De Vitry, you go," said Charles, eagerly, for cruelty was no part of his character, "give my express command to cease from pillage and bloodshed."

"But your Majesty said this youth had won a pair of spurs. I would fain see them on his heels before I go, and here is a fair lady quite ready to buckle them on."

"Go—pray go at once, De Vitry," said Lorenzo, "do not stop to jest on such nonsensical themes. You know not what barbarities are being committed."

"I do not jest at all," replied De Vitry, "but

I will go. To hear the boy one would think I was made up of bad jokes."

"It was no joke, Signor Lorenzo," said the King. "You have taken the first town we have attacked, for I saw you first upon the walls. But go, my lord Marquis, restore order in the place, and as you pass the hill, send down our banner. We will give him the accolade, even here in his lady's sight, under the royal standard, to encourage others to serve their lady and their King as well as he has done to-day."

CHAPTER III.

It was in the King's tent, on the night after the fall of Vivizano—for so rapid had been the capture of the place that time for a short march towards Sarzana still remained after its fall, and so wild and uncultivated was the country round, so scanty the supply of provisions and fodder, that all were anxious to get into a more plentiful region. It was in the King's tent then, a wide and sumptuous pavilion, that on the night after the capture of Vivizano a council was assembled, amongst the members of which might be seen nearly as many churchmen as soldiers.

It is impossible to narrate a thousandth part of all that took place; messengers and soldiers

came and went; new personages were introduced upon the scene; and some of the old characters which had disappeared returned to the monarch's court.

A young man, magnificently dressed, and of comely form and face, sat near to Charles on his right hand; and when Bayard, who was standing with Lorenzo a little behind the King's chair, asked Visconti who the new-comer was, Lorenzo answered:

"That is Pierre de Medici. We were old companions long ago; for he is not many years my elder."

"His face looks weak!" said Bayard; "I should not think he was equal to his father."

Lorenzo shook his head with a sigh; and De Terrail continued:

"There is our old friend, Ludovic, the Moor, too. He arrived to-day, I suppose. I wonder the King has you here; he was always so anxious to keep you out of his way."

"The camp is a safer place than the court," said Lorenzo; "he cannot well poison me here."

"No, nor stab you either," said Bayard, "that is to say, without being found out. Yet you had better beware; for he has got a notion, I am told, that you may some time or another dispute his duchy with him."

"That is nonsense, De Terrail," replied Lorenzo: "the Duke of Orleans is nearer to the dukedom than I am."

"Ay, but policy might keep the Duke out and favor you," said Bayard. "It does not do to make a subject too powerful. But what are they about now? What packet is that which Breconnel is opening and laying its contents before the King?"

"That looks like the papal seal pendant from it," replied Visconti. "Hark! the Bishop is about to read it aloud?"

The conversation of the two young men had been carried on in a low tone, and many another whispered talk had been going on amongst the courtiers, drowned by the louder sounds which had issued from the immediate neighbourhood of the table at which the King sat; but the moment

that the Bishop of St. Malo began to read, or rather to translate, aloud the letters which he held in his hand, and which were written in Latin, every tongue was stilled, and each ear bent to hear.

"His Holiness greets your Majesty well," said the Bishop; "but he positively prohibits your advance to Rome under pain of the major censures of the church. These are his words," and he proceeded in a somewhat stumbling and awkward manner to decipher and render into French the pontifical mission.

The despatch was rather diffuse and lengthy, and while the good Bishop went on, an elderly man plainly habited in black, came round and whispered something several times in the King's ear. Charles turned towards him and listened while the prelate went on; and at last the monarch replied, saying something which was not heard by others, and adding a very significant sign. The secret adviser withdrew at once into an inner apartment of the tent, from the main chamber of which it was separated by

a crimson curtain. He returned in a moment with a large book, on the wood and velvet cover of which reposed a crucifix and a rosary. The Bishop of St. Malo read on; but without noticing him, the man in black knelt before the King, who immediately laid his hand on the crucifix, and then, after murmuring some words in a subdued tone, yet not quite in a whisper, raised the volume to his lips and kissed it with every appearance of reverence.

The book, the crucifix, and the rosary were then removed as silently as they had been brought, and the reading of the Papal brief proceeded without interruption. When the prelate had concluded the reading of the missive which threatened the monarch of France, the eldest son of the church, with all the thunders of the Vatican if he dared to advance upon Rome, Charles, in his low, sweet voice, addressed the Bishop, saying:

“My Lord Bishop, I have but one answer to make to the prohibition of His Holiness, but I trust that answer will be deemed sufficient by all

the members of my council, though all are devout men, and some of them peculiarly reverend by profession and by sanctity of life. I should wish an answer written to our Apostolic Father, assuring him of our deep respect and our willingness to obey his injunctions in all matters of religion, where superior duties from which he himself cannot set us free do not interpose; but informing him of a fact which he does not know, that we are bound by a sacred vow sworn upon the Holy Evangelists, and upon a crucifix which contains a portion of the true cross, to visit the shrine of St. Peter before we turn our steps homewards. Is that not sufficient cause, my Lord Cardinal," he continued, looking towards Julian de Rovera, "to pass by all impediments and prohibitions and go forward on our pilgrimage?"

"Sufficient cause," exclaimed the eager and impetuous Prelate, "what need of any cause? what need of any vow?"

He paused, almost choked by the impetuosity of his feelings; and a smile which had passed

round the council at hearing a vow just taken, alleged as an excuse for disregarding a prohibition issued long before, faded away in eagerness to hear the further reply of a man whose powerful mind and iron will were known to all.

"My lord, the King," he answered, in a calmer tone, after he had recovered breath. "Your vow is all sufficient, but there are weightier causes even than that solemn vow which call you to Rome. The greatest, the most important task which ever monarch undertook lies before you. A Heresiarch sits in the throne of St. Peter, a man whose private life, base and criminal as it is, is pure compared with his public life—whose guilt, black as it is, as a priest and a pontiff, is white as snow compared with his guilt as the pretended head of the Christian church, in negotiating with, and allying himself to infidels—to the slaves of Mahomed, against Christian men and monarchs, the most devout servants of the holy see. Well may I see consternation, surprise, and even incredulity,

on the countenances of all present! But I speak not on rumour, or the vague report of the enemies of Alexander Borgia, calling himself Pope. Happily into my hands have fallen these letters which have passed between him and Bajazet, the Infidel Sultan. They are too long to read now; but I deliver them into the hands of the King's council, and will only state a few of the facts which they make manifest. Thus it appears, from these letters, of which the authenticity is beyond doubt, that this heretical interloper in the chair of St. Peter, has agreed to receive, and does receive an annual pension from Antichrist, and that he has engaged for three hundred thousand ducats to assassinate an unhappy prince of the infidels, named Zizim, who is in his power, to gratify the impious Sultan of the Turks. Let the council read these letters; let them consider them well; let them compare the life and conversation of the man with these acts of the pontiff, and then decide whether it is not the duty of the most Christian King, not only to march to Rome, but to call a council of the

Church Universal, for the trial and deposition of one who holds his seat, not by the grace of God, but by the aid of Simony, and the machinations of the devil. My lord, the King, I address you as the eldest son of the church, as the descendant of those who have struggled, and fought, and bled for her; and I call upon you to deliver her from the oppression under which she groans, to eject from her highest place the profane man who has no right to the seat of St. Peter, and to purify the temple and the altar from the desecration of a Borgia.*

Charles hesitated for a few moments ere he replied, and two or three of those quiet counsellors, one of whom had previously

* The facts alleged against Alexander by the Cardinal were, unfortunately, only too notorious, and the letters produced were the authentic letters of Borgia and Bajazet. They are still extant and authenticated by the Apostolic Notary. In one from the Pope to the Sultan he demands "*ut placeat sibi (Bajazet) quam citius mittere nobis ducatos quadraginta millia in auro venetos, pro annata anni presentis, quae finiet ultimo die novembris*" and Bajazet sweetly suggests to his Christian ally, "*dictum Gem (Zizim) levare facere ex angustiis istius mundi et transferri ejus animam in alterum saeculum ubi meliorem habebit quietem,*" promising him three hundred thousand ducats as soon as the corpse is delivered to his (Bajazet's) agents.

addressed him, now came separately and spoke to him in low tones over the back of his chair.

"My lord, the Cardinal," he said at length, "the grave subject your Eminence has brought before us, is of so important a nature that it requires much and calm consideration. Rome is yet far off, and on our march thither we shall have many an occasion to call for your counsel. This subject, surpassing all others in importance, must engage our attention when we can have a more private interview; for it will be needful to avoid in doing our best to purify the church, the great danger of creating a scandal in the church itself."

"Wisely spoken, my lord, the King," answered the Prelate, "but I should like at present to know, who is the messenger who has had the hardihood to bear a prohibition from entering the holy city to the successor of Charlemagne.*

* The Kings of France always claimed to be such, and the Bishop flattered the monarch's pride by the allusion.

Can it be one of the Sacred College? If so, why is he not here present?"

"Why, to speak the truth," said the Bishop of St. Malo, with a rueful smile, "his holiness has not altogether shown the respect which is due to his own brief, or to his Majesty's crown in the choice of a messenger. He who has brought the missive is a common courier. He calls himself, indeed, a gentleman of Rome, and, by the way, he has with him a man who desires to see and speak with your Eminence, for whom, he says, he has letters. They may, perhaps, throw some light upon the question why his holiness did not entrust such an important paper to a more dignified bearer."

To uninstructed ears the words of the good Bishop had little special meaning; but intrigue and corruption were then so general, especially in Italian courts, that the Cardinal Julian, at once perceived from the language used, a doubt in the mind of some of the King's counsellors as to whether, while declaiming against Alexander,

he might not be secretly negotiating with him for his own purposes."

"Let the man be brought in," he said, abruptly. "I know not who should write to me from Rome; but we shall soon see. Good faith! I have had little communication with any one in that city since the taking of Ostia. Let the man be called, I beseech you, my good and reverend lord."

The Bishop of St. Malo spoke to one of the attendants; the man quitted the tent, and some other business was proceeded with, occupying about a quarter of an hour, when a personage was introduced and brought to the end of the table, whom the reader has heard of before. He was a small, thin, wiry man, dressed as a friar. His countenance was not very prepossessing, and his complexion both sallow and sun-burned, except where a thick black beard closely shaved, gave a bluish tint to the skin; and there a great difference of hue in the skin itself, seemed to intimate that the razor had only lately been applied.

"Who are you, sir?" said the Cardinal sharply, as soon as his attention had been directed to the new comer, "and what want you with me? I am Julian de Rovera, Cardinal of St. Peter's, if you are seeking that person."

"I am but a poor friar of the Order of St. Francis, Brother Martin by name," replied the man, "and the Signor Ramiro d'Orco, a noble lord now in Rome, hearing that I was journeying to Bologna——"

"But this is not Bologna," said the Cardinal, "nor on the way thither."

"True, your Eminence," answered the other, "but, as I was saying, the Signor Ramiro, hearing that I was going to Bologna, entrusted certain letters to my care for your Eminence, whom he asserted to be his near relation——"

"Ay, ay! cousins—first cousins," said the impetuous Prelate, "what then?"

"Why, holy sir," continued the pretended friar, "finding that you were not where the Signor Ramiro thought, and knowing that the letters were important, I joined myself to

the messenger of His Holiness and came on hither."

A slight smile passed over the lip of Ludovic the Moor, as the man spoke; and it is not at all improbable that he recognized in the monk a follower of his bravo, Buondoni; but he took no notice, and the Cardinal exclaimed:

"Where are these letters? Let me see them, brother."

"They are here, Eminence," answered the man, feeling in the breast of his gown. "This is for you," and he presented one letter to the Cardinal, while he held another in his hand.

"And what is that? Who is that for?" asked Julian sharply.

"That is for the Signora Leonora d'Orco, if I can find her," replied the monk.

"I can find her," said the Cardinal; "let me see the letter."

The man hesitated; but the Prelate repeated, in a stern tone, "Let me see the letter," and it was handed to him with evident reluctance. Without the slightest ceremony he broke the

seal, even before he had examined the letter addressed to himself, and began reading it by the light of the candelabra which stood near him.

The contents seemed by no means to give him satisfaction, and as he was much in the habit of venting his thoughts aloud, it is probable that an oath or two would have found their way to his lips, had he not been restrained, not only by a sense of his sacred calling, but by the presence of so many strangers.

"Santa Maria!" he exclaimed, "did ever man hear! A pretty father truly. Would he cradle a new born infant in a sow's sty?"

"Hark ye, friar! if you reach Rome before me, tell my good cousin that I have too much regard for his wife's child to let her set her foot in the palace of any of the Borgias. Tell him that, being guarded by a noble gentleman and a good soldier, and guided and directed by me, she will be quite safe till she reaches Florence, and that there I shall place her under the matronly care of our cousin, Madonna Francesca Melloni. Now get you gone."

"Your Eminence says nothing of his letter to yourself;" said the pretended friar, with a slight sneer. "I will not fail to give him your answer to his letter to his daughter."

"Ha! his letter to myself," said Julian; "I had forgotten that—but doubtless it is of no great importance;—let me see," and he tore open the epistle.

It seemed to afford him less satisfaction than even the other had given; for his face worked, and many a broken sentence burst angrily from his lips; but at length he turned to the messenger, again saying:

"Tell him I will answer this in person—perhaps in the Vatican. Yet stop, say, moreover, 'none but wolves herd with wolves.' Let him mark that; he will understand. There is money for your convent; now get ye gone."

It had not been without some feeling of indignation that Lorenzo had beheld Ramiro d'Orco's letter to his daughter so dealt with; but the conclusion to which the Prelate came pleased him well.

The whole interview between the Cardinal and the messenger had not occupied much more than about five minutes; but yet it could hardly be called an episode in the council of King Charles, for on some account most of those present seemed to take no inconsiderable interest in what was passing at that part of the table, and all other business was suspended. The eyes of the King and his counsellors were directed now to the Prelate, now to the messenger, and the only sounds that interfered with the conversation were some whispered remarks going on amongst the young officers behind.

When the monk was gone there was a silent pause, as if every one waited for another to open some new topic for discussion, but at length the King said—

“You seem dissatisfied with your cousin’s letter, my Lord Cardinal. Is it of importance?”

“Not in the least, sire,” answered Julian; “Ramiro tries to compose what he calls, ‘an ancient but really slight difference, between me

and Alexander Borgia. Really slight difference! Oh yes, the saints be praised, it is as slight as the difference between oil and water or fire and ice. Can the man think that a few soft words or the offer of two or three towns and castles, can make me look with favor upon a Simonise, an adulterer, a poisoner, a heretic, and an abettor of heretics, in the chair of St. Peter? No, no. There is the letter, my lord the king, for your private reading. I have nothing to conceal; I deal in no serpent-like policy, and now with your Majesty's permission I will retire. I have not the strength I once had, and I am somewhat weary. If you will allow me I will take the young gentleman, Lorenzo Visconti, with me, as I see him here. We can take counsel together as I go to my tent."

"We are sorry to lose your wisdom at our council, my lord Cardinal," replied the king, "but happily our more important business is over. Signor Visconti, conduct his Eminence to his quarters."

"Let me call the torch bearers, my lord,"

said Lorenzo, springing to the entrance of the tent, round which a crowd of attendants were assembled. But the impetuous prelate came hard upon his steps and stood more patiently than might have been expected till his flambeaux were lighted. Two torch bearers and a soldier or two went before, and he followed with Lorenzo by his side, walking slowly along and keeping silence till they had nearly reached his pavilion.

"Well, young man?" said the Cardinal at length, "what think you of my reply to my good cousin Ramiro? Did it satisfy you?"

"Fully, your Eminence," answered the young man; "it was all that I could wish or desire. Indeed I cannot but think that it was a special blessing of God that you were here to rescue me from a terrible difficulty regarding the Signora Leonora."

"How so—how so?" asked the Prelate quickly, "you would not have sent her to Rome, would you, even if I had not been here?"

"No, my lord Cardinal," answered Lorenzo firmly, "but it is a terrible thing to teach a

child to disobey a parent. You had spiritual authority and a nearer right, and no one can doubt that you decided justly and well. Had I done the same, all men would have judged that my mere inclinations led me."

"You are wise and prudent beyond your years," said the old man well pleased, "no use of conference as I told you this morning, there before Vivizano. I make up my mind of men's characters rapidly but seldom wrongly. Here, take Ramiro's letter to Leonora, and recount to her all I did. Tell her, that by the altar I serve and the God I worship, and the Saviour in whom I put my trust, I could not consent to her being plunged into a sea of guilt and pollution, such as the world has never seen since the days of Heliogabulus."

"I fear my lord Cardinal, she has retired to rest," said Lorenzo," but if so I will deliver the letter and your Eminence's words to-morrow."

A slight smile came upon the old man's face; but notwithstanding his sternness and occasional violence, softer and kinder emotions would some-

times spring up from his heart. He crossed himself as if sorry for the mere worldly smile; and then looking up on high, where the stars were sparkling clear and bright, he murmured, "Well, after all, this pure young love is a noble and beautiful thing. Good night, my son, God's benison and mine be upon you."

They had now reached the entrance of his tent and there they parted.

CHAPTER IV.

From the rejoicing gates of Pisa—set free by the King of France from the burdensome yoke of Florence—the royal army took its way to the daughter of Fiesole. Steadily, though slowly it marched on, and Lorenzo Visconti led the van. Oh what thoughts, what struggles of feeling, what various emotions perplexed him when he saw the walls and towers of Florence rising before him! There his early infancy had passed after his father had perished in the successful effort to rid his country of a tyrant, but only, alas, to give her another. There had his youth been protected, his life saved, his education received, his fortunes cared for, his happiest days passed. And now he approached

the cradle of his youth at the head of an invading army.

With his lance upon his thigh and his beaver raised he gazed upon the beautiful city with apprehension but not without hope. He knew that Florence had no power to resist; that her walls were too feeble, her towers not strong enough to make any successful defence against the tremendous train of artillery which followed the French army. He trembled to think of what might be the consequence of one bombard fired from those battlements, one gate closed upon the foe. The scenes of Vivizano returned to his imagination, and he thought he saw the forms of well known friends and early companions exposed to the license and brutality of the cruel soldiery.

"I at least come not as an enemy," he thought, "and perchance if it be God's good will, I may do something in return for all that Florence has done for me."

He looked anxiously round as he continued his march, but he could see no signs of resistance. Now his eyes rested upon the calm Arno flowing

on, alternately seen and lost; and then he caught a glimpse of the Mugnione, then a torrent but now a brook, rushing down from the Appenines. Many a winding road caught his eye, but nothing appeared upon them but trains of peasantry seemingly seeking shelter from the apprehended pillage by the light troops of the French army.

Many a time he sent a message back to the king to say that all was quiet and peaceable; and more than once he fell somewhat into the rear of his party to speak a word or two to some one in a litter, well guarded, which had followed during the last three days' march. But still all remained quiet, and he saw no reason to suppose that the rumours which had been current in the French camp were correct. Those rumours had imported, that the acts of Pierre de Medici, who had sought the king of France and humbly submitted to any terms which the monarch's council thought fit to dictate, had been disavowed by the Signoria, Pierre himself obliged to fly in disgrace, and that the citizens were resolved to defend their homes to the last, had any founda-

tion. It is true that he had never seen such a number of peasants seeking the city before; and he remarked that there were few if any women and no children amongst them. But there stood the gates wide open with nothing but half a dozen armed men at some of the entrances to indicate that it was a fortified place. No order had been given to halt at any particular spot, and Lorenzo rode on till he was not more than three hundred yards from the Pisa gate, when a large party of the King's *fourriers* and harbingers, accompanied by a trumpeter, passed him at the gallop and rode straight up to the city. The trumpet blew, and admission for the King of France was demanded in a loud tone, when one of the officers on guard stepped forward and replied, "We have no orders to oppose the King's entrance."

Just at that moment the Cardinal Julian came up on a fine swift mule, followed by numerous cross bearers and attendants and paused by the side of Lorenzo saying, "follow me into the city, my son. I have the King's order to that effect.

We will first carry our young charge to the house of Madonna Francesca, and then both you and I may have some charitable work on hand to mediate between the monarch and the citizens."

"But whether does his Majesty direct his own steps?" asked Lorenzo eagerly, "how shall we find him?"

"He goes direct to the palace of the Podesta," said the Cardinal, "come on—come on, before the crowd of soldiery overtakes us."

The troop moved on and was the first body of regular soldiers to pass the gates. There was some noise and confusion, the *fouriers*, a loud and boisterous body of men, asking many questions of the Florentine soldiers at the guard house, to which but sullen answers were returned; and Lorenzo judged it a point of duty to relieve the Tuscans of the charge of the gate and place a French guard there to ensure against anything like treachery. The Cardinal coinciding, the change was soon made without resistance, and the troops passed on into the city. The day was dark, and the tall fortress-like houses of the

streets looked sad and gloomy, though through the narrow windows of the massive walls peered forth a crowd of human faces watching in silence the passage of the French men-at-arms. No smile was upon any countenance, no look of admiration at the rich surcoats and glittering arms; but every thing bore the same stern and gloomy aspect, and Lorenzo remarked that many of the persons he saw were heavily armed.

At length in the Via Ghibelina Julian de Rovera stopped his mule before a large heavy entrance gate, and commanded one of his palfreniers to seek admittance. The whole cavalcade was eyed attentively by more than one person through a small iron grated window at the side of the door, and though it was announced to the observers that no less a person than the Cardinal of St. Peter's sought admission to see his cousin, Mona Francesca, he was not permitted to enter till one or two embassies had passed between the wicket and the saloons above. At length he was suffered to pass into the court with his own train alone; but Lorenzo and his band, and even Leonora

and her women were kept waiting in the street, subject to the gaze of many an eye from the houses round.

The two young lovers did not fail to employ the time of expectation to the best advantage. It was a painful and somewhat embarrassing moment, and required both consolation and consideration. They were about to be separated, after having enjoyed unrestrained a period of sweet companionship and happy intimacy which falls to the lot of few young people so situated towards each other. Lorenzo leaned into the litter and spoke to her he loved with words little restrained by the presence of Mona Mariana, of whose kindness and discretion he was by this time well aware, and whom he had bound to himself for life by a more valuable present than any one else was at all likely to bestow.

What matters it what he said? It would be strangely uninteresting to others, though his words caused many an emotion in her to whom they were addressed, and sprang from many an emotion in his own heart. He sketched eager

plans of future meeting; he proposed schemes for evading the strictness and severity of the lady Francesca, whom neither of them knew; he arranged the means of communication when the King's forward march should prevent the possibility of any personal intercourse.

Vain! vain! as every scheme of man regarding the future. Fate stands behind the door and laughs while lovers lay their plots. Half the schemes of Lorenzo were needless, and the other half proved impracticable.

The Cardinal detained them but a short time, and when he returned Lorenzo found he had been throwing away stratagems.

"Haste! hand the dear child from her litter," he said, "and both of you come with me. Mona Francesca agrees to receive and protect her as her own child, provided you will give her the security of a French guard; for she mightily fears the Swiss and the Gascons. I have assured her that you will leave twenty men here for the present, and that I will obtain the consent of King Charles to your being quartered with all

your troops in the court and the lower story; the men must be quartered somewhere, you know."

"Certainly," replied Lorenzo, with almost too much readiness, "and why not here—if it be the wish of your Eminence—as well as elsewhere?"

While speaking he advanced to the side of the litter, and aided Leonora to descend. She was somewhat paler than usual, for the feeling of being in a strange city occupied suddenly by foreign troops, upon whom there was no knowing how soon a fierce and active population might rise, was more terrible to her than even the sight of actual war.

Expectation almost always goes beyond reality both in its fears and in its hopes. It is uncertainty which gives its sting to dread. The Cardinal, however, took her by the hand and led her into the court yard, where a few old men and two or three younger, but perhaps not more serviceable persons, were assembled in arms, and turning sharp to the right ascended the great

staircase to the principal apartments of the Palace. A magnificent hall and several large saloons intervened between the first landing and the smaller cabinet in which Mona Francesca awaited her visitors.

What a different personage presented herself at length to the eyes of Leonora and Lorenzo from that which either had expected to behold.

The one had pictured her distant cousin as a tall, thin, acerb-looking Madonna, more fitted for the cloister than the world. The other had figured her as a portly commanding dame, to whose behests all were to bow obsequiously. But there sat the future guardian of Leonora, the picture of good-humoured indolence. The remains of a very beautiful face, a countenance rather sweet than firm, a figure which might have once been pretty, but which was now approaching the obese, a pretty foot stretched out from beneath her dress, with fine hair and teeth, made up almost altogether the sum of Mona Francesca. She had been for ten years a virtuous wife. She had been for twelve or

thirteen years a discreet and virtuous widow. She loved her ease and her independence too well to risk again matrimony, once tried, and with some feelings of devotion, and a good deal both of time and money to spare, she had gained with the clergy and with the religious orders of Florence almost the character of a saint—by doing nothing either wrong or right.

She welcomed Leonora kindly, and perhaps none the less that she was accompanied by a young and handsome cavalier,—for though her weaknesses never deviated into indiscretions, she had a great taste for the beautiful, and was a true connoisseur of masculine beauty. She made Leonora sit beside her and gave Lorenzo her jewelled hand to kiss, entering with him at once into a conversation which might have been long, had not the impatient Cardinal interfered.

“Well, well,” he exclaimed, “you can talk with him about all that hereafter. You will have plenty of time. At present we must follow the King to the Podesta.”

"Stay, stay," cried Mona Francesca. "Do not forget he is to leave twenty men on guard. Ah! I fear those dreadful Frenchmen terribly! They tell me the widows suffered more than any at Vivizano."

"I doubt it," said the Cardinal; but Lorenzo consoled her, by assuring her that twenty men should certainly be left to protect her, without adding that they were all those dreadful Frenchmen whom she seemed to fear so much; and then followed the Cardinal to the court-yard, where his arrangements were soon made. A French ensign was hung out above the great gate, a couple of soldiers stationed on guard in the street, and a sufficient force left within to ensure the safety of the place against any body of those licentious stragglers which followed all armies in those days in even greater numbers than they do at present.

In the meantime the Cardinal had ridden on, accompanied by his own train; and Lorenzo followed, guiding his men himself through the well remembered streets, where so much of his own

young life had been spent. It was not without some uneasiness that he marked the aspect of the city. There was many a sign, or rather many an indication that though the Florentines had admitted the army of the King of France within their walls, they were prepared to resist even in their own streets, any attempt at tyrannical domination. Few persons appeared out of shelter of the houses, and those few were well armed. But the multitudes of faces at the windows, and the glance of steel at every door that happened even to be partly open, showed a state of preparation equal to the occasion, and the youth, calculating the chances of a struggle between the army and the population of the city, should a conflict arise, could not but come to the conclusion that, shut up in streets and squares of which they knew nothing, surrounded by houses, every one of which was a fortress, and opposed by a body vastly more numerous, the French force might find all its military skill and discipline unavailing, and have cause to rue the rash confidence of the King.

Just as he was entering upon that great square, near which are collected so many inestimable treasures of art, a man fully armed, started forth from a gateway, and laid his hand upon his horse's rein. Lorenzo laid his hand upon his sword; but the other without raising his visor, addressed him by name in a stern voice: "I little thought to see you here, with a foreign invader, Lorenzo Visconti," he said, "but mark me, and let your King know. Florence will be trodden down by no foreign despot. Let him be moderate in his demands, calm and peaceful in his demeanour, or he will leave his last man in these streets should we all perish in resisting insolence or tyranny. Look around you as you go, and you will see that every house is filled with our citizens or peasantry; and though willing to concede much for peace, we are ready to dare all for liberty. Let this be enough between us. Ride on, and ride fast, for on this very moment hangs a destiny. At the first sound of the bell, a conflict will begin that will seal the fate of Italy. Ride on, I say. You

know our customs. Take care that the bell does not ring."

"Who are you? What is your name?" asked Lorenzo; but the man made no reply, and retreated under the archway whence he had come.

Winding through the crowds which occupied the Piazza, the young knight and his party overtook the Cardinal just as he was dismounting at the gates of the great heavy building, known as the *Podesta*; and springing to his stirrup, Lorenzo in a whisper communicated to him rapidly the fears he entertained of some sudden and terrible conflict between the citizens and the French soldiery, should the demands of the King be excessive or tyrannical.

"It is right his Majesty should know the state of the city," he said; "and if I can obtain speech of him, he shall know it; for no one can judge of the signs around us better than myself, whose boyhood has been passed in these streets and squares."

"You shall have speech of him," said the

Cardinal, "follow me quickly. They must be at it already. Where is the King, boy?—where is the council?"

A page whom he addressed led him up the great staircase, and hurrying his pace, he was soon in that great council chamber where the fate of Florence had been so often decided.

The scene it now presented, was very striking. The King of France was seated in a chair of state, with many of his officers and counsellors around, and the Bishop of St. Malo standing at his left hand. Before him stood a number of the magistrates of Florence, richly robed, and on the faces of all present might be seen a sharp and angry expression, as if some bitter words had been already passing. The room was crowded; but as the Cardinal and Lorenzo entered, they could see the Bishop of St. Malo, take a step across the open space between the King and the magistrates. and hand a written paper to one of the latter, on whose face the very first words brought a heavy frown.

Holding Lorenzo by the hand, Julian de

Rovera pushed his way through the crowd, murmuring, "God send we be not too late," and at length reached the monarch's side where he bent his head to the King's ear, saying abruptly, "This young man has matter of life and death to communicate to you, sire. Listen to him for a moment ere you do aught else."

The King raised his eyes to Lorenzo's face, and then inclined his ear, making the young man a sign to speak.

"My Lord," said Lorenzo in a whisper, "no one about you knows Florence as well as I do. You and your army are on the brink of a volcano. The houses all around are filled with armed men. Not only are the citizens prepared to rise at a moment's notice, but the town has been crowded with the neighbouring peasantry, and although your Majesty is in full possession of the town, a conflict in these streets might be more disastrous than can be told."

"Hark," said the king, "the old man is speaking;" and, raising his head, he gazed upon the magistrate who had been reading the paper.

"King of France," said the old man, in a fierce and impetuous tone, "these demands are outrageous. They are insulting to the people of Florence; and thus I deal with them;" and as he spoke he tore the paper in pieces and flung the fragments on the floor. "I tell you, sire," he continued, "that nothing like these terms will be granted. Our course is taken; our minds are made up. We were all willing to pay you due respect,—to grant all that might be requisite for your security, or to assist you for your comfort. But we will not be treated as a conquered people till we are conquered; and, even then, we will be the slaves of no man. Either propose terms in reason, or else—why, sound your trumpets and we will toll our bells, and on him who is the aggressor fall the guilt of all the blood which will dye our streets."

"Good God! the man is mad," exclaimed one of the king's councillors.

"*Mere de Dieu!*" cried another, "he has had the insolence to tear the edict!"

"We are ready to obey your Majesty's com-

mands," said the stern Montpensier, in a cold tone.

"I go to take orders against an outbreak, sire," said La Tremouille in a low voice, "it is not to be concealed that we are in a somewhat dangerous position here."

"Sire, you had better get out of the rat-trap," said De Vitry, "I will guard you with my men-at-arms, and keep one gate open for the rest to follow. My head for your safety; and once out we shall soon bring these gentlemen to reason."

"Peace," said the king, "peace my friends. Let me speak.—You have done wrong, sir, to tear that paper," he continued with an air of much dignity, addressing the bold old man. "We had not read it ourselves. It was far from our intention to demand any outrageous terms; but only such as a republic might expect who had refused our friendship and set at nought our proffers of alliance. Hastily drawn up by our council, and tendered to you here more as an outline of what might be our demands than as what they actually are, the paper may have con-

tained something you could not comply with, but nothing to warrant so much heat, I think. Have you a copy, my Lord Bishop?"

"Here is one, sire," replied the minister, handing him a paper.

The King took it and read it with slowness and evident difficulty. "This is too much," he said when he had done, "Signor Pierro Capponi has some show of reason for his anger. My Lord Bishop, these terms must be mitigated. I will retire to another chamber and leave you with the magistrates of the city to decide upon some more equitable arrangement, with his Eminence here to moderate between you. What I demand is that compensation shall be made in gold for the expense and delay to which I have been subjected by the resistance of strong places in a country professing to be friendly to me; and that sufficient security be given that my return to France, when it pleases me, shall not be interrupted. Your council had better be held in private. There are too many persons present. Let

all but my council and the Signoria of Florence follow me."

Thus saying, he rose and left the hall.

The result is well known. A large sum of money, part of which found its way into the purses of the king's counsellors, and vague promises of alliance and security, were all that the Florentines had to pay; and the lesson of the morning was sufficiently impressive to produce better discipline and forbearance amongst the French troops than they had exercised elsewhere.

CHAPTER V.

OH, those days of happiness how soon they come to an end! Poets and philosophers have attempted in vain to convey to the mind by figures and by argument the brevity of enjoyment, and the great master only came near the truth when he declared it was—

“ Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
That in a spleen unfolds both heaven and earth,
And ere a man hath power to say—Behold!
The jaws of darkness do devour it up.”

Enjoyment is the most brief of all things, for its very nature is to destroy time. Like the fabled monster of one of the Indian tribes—we drink up the waters in which we float, and

leave ourselves at last on a dry and arid shore. But if enjoyment be so transient, hope is permanent. Well did the ancients represent her as lingering behind after all else had flown out of the casket of Pandora. She does linger still in the casket of every human heart, whether it be joys or evils that pass away.

“Quando il miser dispera
La speranza parla e dice,
Sta su, tienti, vivi, e spera
Che sarai ancor felice.

* * *
Ogni casa al mondo manca
La speranza mai si perde.”

So sang Serafino l'Aquilano, a poet of the days of Lorenzo and Leonora, and for a time at least they found the song true.

Hope remained after happiness had passed; but yet how bright were those days and nights of happiness which the two young lovers passed in Florence!

Are you old enough to have forgotten, reader, how, in your early youth, you deified the object

LEONORA D'ORCO.

of your love? How her very presence seemed to spread an atmosphere of joy around her? How her look was sunshine and her voice the song of a seraph? Can you remember it? Then think what must have been the feelings of Lorenzo Visconti and Leonora d'Orco, at an age when the fire of passion is the brightest, because the purest—where all those attributes of beauty, and grace, and excellence with which imagination is wont to invest the beloved objects were really present, and when the fancy of the heart spread her wings from a higher point than she commonly can find on earth. Think what must have been their feelings when in a lovely climate, amidst beautiful scenes, in a land of song, where the treasures of ancient and of modern art were just beginning to unfold themselves—the one issuing from the darkness of the past, the other dawning through the twilight of the future; think what must have been their feelings, when, in such scenes and with such accessories to the loving loveliness in their own hearts, they were suffered, almost unrestrained,

to enjoy each other's society to the full, when and where they liked.

The old cardinal, plunged deep in politics and worldly schemes and passions, took little heed of them. Mona Francesca was no restraint upon them. Sometimes in long rambles by the banks of the Arno, sometimes mingling with the gay masked multitudes that thronged the streets on the clear soft autumnal nights, sometimes seated in the beautiful gardens of the city of flowers, sometimes reposing in the luxurious apartments of the Casa Morelli, the days and greater part of the nights were passed during the stay of the French army in Florence. It was a dream of joy, and it passed as a dream.

Gradually, however, the shadow stole over the sunshine. The day for the march was named, and came nearer and nearer. Lorenzo had to go on, fighting his way with the forces of the King; Leonora was to remain behind in Florence. They were to part in short; and the sorrow of parting came upon them. But then there was hope—hope singing her eternal song of cheering melody,

picturing the coming time when a bright reunion would wipe out the very memory of sorrow, and when, perhaps, the link of their fate might be riveted too firmly for any future separation. The old cardinal encouraged the idea, and promised to give the blessing on their union, and Mona Francesca sighed, and thought, perhaps, matrimony the next happiest state to widowhood.

The day came: the last parting embrace was given—the last, long clinging kiss was taken—the last wave of the hand, as the troop filed down the street, and then Leonora d'Orco was left to the solitude of her own thoughts. The multitude of turbulent emotions which had thrilled through her heart were all still. It was as when a gay crowd that has been laughing, and singing, and revelling, suddenly departs and leaves the scene of rejoicing all silent and solitary. The words of Leonardo da Vinci's song came back to her mind—

"Oft have I wept for joys too soon possessed!"

And retiring to her own chamber she gave way to very natural tears. Nor were they soon over, nor was the emotion in which they arose transient. Nothing was evanescent in the character of Leonora d'Orco. Even young as she was, all was deep, strong, and permanent.

But I must leave her alone for the present with her tears, or with the sadness that followed them, and proceed with Lorenzo Visconti on the march towards Rome and Naples; not that I intend to dwell upon battles or sieges, intrigues or negociations; but I merely purpose to give a slight sketch of the historical events that followed, with one or two detached scenes more in detail, where public transactions affected the fate of those of whom I write. With audacity bordering upon folly, Charles VIII. advanced rapidly upon Rome, without having taken any efficient steps to guard his communications with France. Each step rendered his position more perilous, and had there been anything like unity amongst the Italian princes or states it is probable that neither the king of France or his gal-

lant army would ever have seen Paris again. The Pope, too, thundered at him from the Vatican, admitted Neapolitan troops into Rome, and endeavoured to raise the partisans of the church in the imperial city, to aid him in repelling the advancing enemy. But Alexander found no support. No one loved, no one respected him, and his call upon the citizens was made in vain. On, step by step, the French monarch advanced, but, as he neared the city which had once been the capital of the world, a degree of uncertainty came over him, and discord manifested itself in his council. The cardinal of St. Peter urged him strongly to depose the monster whose brow defiled the tiara; several other bishops and cardinals joined in the demand. Some of the stern old military men, too, argued on the same side, but the smooth bishop of St. Malo and many of the king's lay-counsellors recommended negotiation; advised that the march of the army should be retarded or stopped, and that skilful diplomats should be sent forward to treat for peaceful admission into Rome.

An eminent position is a curse for the weak, and a peril for the strong. Till we can see into the hearts of men, no king can ever know the secret motives, the dark selfishness, the pitiful objects, the vain, the mercenary, the ambitious ends which lie at the bottom of all the advice, and every suggestion they receive. We see the honest and the true neglected; we see the noble and the wise make shipwreck, and we know not whence it comes. The man who would map out the currents of the ocean would confer a signal benefit upon his race and accomplish a most laborious task; but he who would trace and expose all the under currents of a court would undertake a more herculean enterprise still. Nor can the wisest and the best of those who rule the destinies of men escape such pernicious influences. They can but judge by what they see, while it is what they do not see which is bearing them wrong. They may consult the magnet or the pole star. they may reckon closely and well, but they can neither calculate nor perceive those under currents which are bearing them upon the shoals or

rocks of injustice or of danger. Nor are they in most cases to blame. Suffice it, if in regard to great and plain facts where there can be no deceit, their unassisted judgment leads them right. I myself, accustomed to courts, have seen the wisest, the very firmest of men misled to do small acts of wrong to their most deserving of friends. Could I blame them even if I myself suffered? Oh, no! The whispered word, the well-improved opportunity, the casual insinuation—all the arts which the noble will not stoop to practice, are engines in the hands of the crafty, which will blind the clearest eye, deceive the most perspicacious mind.

How much more allowance should be made for a young, inexperienced, and half-educated monarch like Charles VIII. if he did not discover that the hope of a cardinal but swayed Breconnel in his advice, that this counsellor had been promised a sum of money; or that had hopes of a castle or an estate in Romagna! that one aimed at being protonotary; or another an arch-deacon of the Roman hierarchy. All these

things were going on in his court and camp, and all these influenced the advice he received; but how could he know it?

The party of the negociators succeeded. Charles sent envoys into Rome to treat with Alexander. They went away full of confidence; they told the king that in a few days they would return with all the stipulations he required, assented to. What was his surprise to hear that his envoys had been arrested, two thrown into prison, and two given up to the Neapolitan troops which were in the city.

Rage and indignation took possession of him, and he gave orders that the army should march the next morning; but there were still peaceful counsellors near at hand; the march was put off till next day, and before that hour the news arrived that two of the envoys had been set free. Two however, were still detained, and the further advance of the army began.

Still Alexander vacillated and hesitated, now giving way to bursts of furious passion, now

yielding to immoderate terror; but that vacillation had now to give way. A military envoy appeared at the court of the sovereign pontiff, and with very little ceremony delivered his message in the presence of Ferdinand, the young prince of Naples, who stood at Alexander's right hand.

"What have you to say, Signor de Vitry?" asked the Pope, affecting a tone of calmness which he was far from feeling.

"Merely this, Holiness," answered Vitry, "the army of my Sovereign Lord the King of France is within an hour's march of the walls; he desires to know if you are prepared to receive him within them. The day is nearly spent; he will have no time to force the gates to-night, and the men must be lodged somewhere."

Alexander trembled—partly, perhaps, with rage, but certainly with fear also. He looked to the Prince of Naples: he looked to his son, the Cardinal Borgia, upon whose handsome lips there was a sort of serpent smile; but no one ventured to utter one word of advice, till

Ramiro d'Orco slowly approached his chair, and spoke a few words in a low tone.

"Well," said the Pontiff, "tell the King of France, that I will not oppose his entrance. The Church does not seek to drive even her disobedient children to sacrilege. For myself, I will make no treaty—no stipulation with one who can disregard the repeated injunctions he has received. But for this young Prince and his forces I demand a safe conduct."

"Not for me, your Holiness," said Ferdinand, raising his head proudly. "I need none. My sword is my safe conduct, and I will have no other."

"Then my errand is sped," said De Vitry. "I understand there will be no opposition to the King's entrance?"

The Pontiff bowed his head with the single word, "None," and the envoy retired from his presence and from the city.

"And now to St. Angelo with all speed," cried Alexander. "Quick, Burchard, quick. Let all the valuables be gathered together and

carried to the Castle. Come, Cæsar—come, my son, and bring all the men you can find with you. The place is 'well provisioned already;' and he left the room without bestowing another word upon the young Prince of Naples.

Ferdinand paused a moment in deep thought, and then, with a heavy sigh, quitted the Vatican. Half an hour after he marched out of Rome at the head of a few thousand men, and beheld, by the fading light, the splendid host of the king who was marching to strip his father and himself of their dominions, winding onward—like a glittering snake—towards the gates of Rome.

Here, as at Florence, the fouriers and harbingers of the monarch rode on before the rest of the army, and passed rapidly through the ancient streets filled with the memories of so many ages, marking out quarters for the troops and lodgings for the king and his court. They took no heed to triumphal arch, or broken statue, or ruined amphitheatre; but they marked the faces of the populace who thronged the streets and gathered thickly at the gates, and

they saw a very different expression on those countenances from that which had appeared amongst the Tuscans. To the Romans Charles came as a deliverer, and an occasional shout of gratulation burst from the people as the strange horsemen passed. Hasty preparations only could be made, for the royal army was close behind, and just after sunset on the last day of the year 1494 the French army reached the gates of Rome. Those gates were thrown wide open; and shout after shout burst from the multitude as the men-at-arms poured in. Charles himself was at their head, armed cap-à-pie; "With his lance upon his thigh," says an eye-witness, "as if prepared for battle." The drums beat, the trumpet sounded; and every tenth man of the army carried a torch casting its red glare upon the dazzling arms and gorgeous surcoats of the cavalry, and upon the eager but joyous faces round. Shout after shout burst from the multitude; and thus, as a conqueror, Charles entered Rome.

CHAPTER VI.

ROME, still grand even in her ruin, was in the hands of Charles of France. He had never in his life seen a stroke stricken in actual warfare, except at the insignificant town of Vivizano; he had never made a conquest more important than that of village, nor obtained a victory over more than a score or two of men, and yet he felt himself almost on a par with Charlemagne when he stood in Rome exercising all the powers of an emperor. "He suited his corps de gardes and placed his sentinels in the squares of the noble city," says Old Brantome, "with many rounds and patrols, planted his courts of justice with gallowses and whipping-posts in five or six places;

requisitions were made in his name; his edicts and ordonnances were cried and published with the sound of the trumpet as in Paris. Go find me a King of France who has ever done such things, except Charlemagne; and even he, I think, proceeded not with an authority so proud and imperious."

The morning dawned and found Charles in possession, full and entire, of all Rome except the Castle of St. Angelo; and what is of more importance than the mere fact of being in full possession, he was so with the cordial assent of the whole Roman people. They had groaned under oppression and wrong for years, and the very fact that the oppression was exercised by the most despicable of men, had driven the iron deeper into their souls. Any change was to them a deliverance; and so strongly was this felt that when at day-break some women stood to gaze at the corpse of a robber who had been caught and hanged by his provosts in the night, they shrugged their shoulders, with a laugh, saying, "No more robbers now."

Not long after that early hour, and not far from the spot where some of the orations of Cicero were poured to the admiring people, a young gentleman, in the garb of peace, but with sword by his side and dagger in his girdle, walked slowly up and down, as if waiting for some one, and presently after a small man, in a monk's gown, whom Lorenzo had once seen before, came up, and saluting him led him away in the direction of some buildings, at that time appropriated to the use of distinguished visitors or great favorites of the Papal Court.

They were not unwatched, however; for from behind an old column which stood there not many years ago—it may stand there still for aught I know—glided out the figure of our friend Antonio, and followed them at some distance, keeping in the deep shade cast by the rising sun upon the eastern side of the street. His keen sharp eye was fixed upon them with a suspicious and even anxious look; “By my faith,” he said, “good old Master Esopas was right when he warned us not to warm vipers. I fear me still that one

which I helped to save when he was tolerably well frost-bitten, will some day turn and bite me, or, what is worse, bite young Lorenzo. Perhaps I had better warn his youthful knighthood. He is mighty docile for a young man, and will take a hint from me. But then he knows I love him and that is the secret of it, I do believe; for love's a rarity as this world goes, and, poor boy, having neither father nor mother, who is there to love him but Antonio. By Hercules! I had forgotten the signorina. I am half jealous of the girl, and the only way I can manage to escape being so quite is to love her myself. Ha! they are stopping at that gate; Ramiro lodges there for a score of ducats. Well, well, I will even go in after them, and have a chat with my friend the friar. It is well the holy man should know that he has an intimate acquaintance near."

By this time Lorenzo and the monk had disappeared under the archway and ascended a staircase on the right. It was dirty and dark enough, but the door at the top led into a suite of rooms

of almost regal splendour and oriental luxury. The first and the second chambers were vacant; but in the third Ramiro d'Orco was walking up and down with slow steps, and his stern, thoughtful eyes bent upon the ground. It is probable that he had heard the step of Lorenzo from his first entrance; but he was one of those men who never show emotion of any kind, whatever they may feel—men who are never known to start; and it was not till the young man and the friar were quite near that he even looked up.

"Welcome to Rome, Lorenzo," he said, without embracing him as most Italians would have done, or giving him his hand as an Englishman would not have failed to do, "Friar, you may leave us, and do not let us be interrupted. Sit, Lorenzo, sit! Will you rest on that pile of cushions or on that stuffed dais—stuffed with the inner down of some strange northern bird?"

"I thank you, Signor d'Orco," replied Lorenzo, "but I have been lately taught to sit and lie hard enough. You have indeed every sort of luxury here."

"Do not call them mine," said Ramiro, with a bitter smile. "They belong to my landlord, the holy and noble Cardinal Borgia. Men propose to themselves different objects in life, young sir. Some judge our short space here was given only for enjoyment; others again think it should be a time of active enterprise; one man seeks glory; another power; another wealth. They mostly imagine that they are only, in every object, seeking a means to an end—the covetous will enjoy his wealth hereafter—the ambitious only desires power to benefit his friends or crush his enemies—but they deceive themselves. Only Cæsar Borgia and I admit the naked truth. He says enjoyment is life. I say ambition is enjoyment. But an ambitious man must not sit on soft stools. There is my common seat," and he drew towards him an old wooden chair of the rudest and most uneasy form.

"So," he continued abruptly after they were seated, "you have not brought Leonora with you."

"My lord the matter was decided without me,"

replied Lorenzo, "the Cardinal of St. Peter, your near relation, judged that this was not a fit place for her, but I will not conceal from you that I should have brought her with great reluctance, though every hour of her company is dearer to me than the jewels of a monarch's crown."

"The Cardinal was right and you were right," said Ramiro d'Orco, and plunging into thought, remained silent for several minutes, then looking calmly up in Lorenzo's face, he said, "You are not married yet?"

"Assuredly not, my lord," said the young man with his cheek somewhat burning from a consciousness of thoughts—nay of wishes, if not purposes—which had come and gone in his own heart. "You gave your consent to our betrothal but not to our marriage."

Ramiro d'Orco's eye had been fixed upon him with a cold stedfast gaze while he spoke, and the color in his cheek still deepened.

"I have placed great confidence in you, Lorenzo Visconti," said Leonora's father. "I do not believe you would abuse it, I do not believe

you would wrong her or wrong me. See that you do not!"

"I am incapable of doing either, Signor Ramiro," replied Lorenzo boldly. "I may sometimes have thought for a brief moment, that the only mode of removing some difficulties that presented themselves to us, was to take your consent for granted and unite my fate to hers by a tie which would give me a right both to direct and protect her; but the half formed purpose was always barred by remembrance of the trust you had reposed in me; and Leonora herself can testify that I never even hinted at such a course."

Ramiro d'Orco again paused in silence for a moment, and then said, "Lorenzo Visconti, I have loved you well from causes that you know not. Listen for a moment, there are some men who are so formed that a kindness received or a wrong endured is never forgotten. They are perhaps not the best men in the world's opinion, they have their faults, their frailties; they may commit sins, nay crimes according to the world's esti-

mation—they may be considered cold, selfish, unprincipled; but the waters of these men's hearts have in them a petrifying power which preserves for ever the memories of other men's acts towards them. They cannot forgive, nor forget, nor forbear like other men. A kind word spoken, a good act done towards them in times of difficulty or danger will be remembered for years—ay, for long years—twenty? more than that, and a wrong inflicted will equally cut into the memory and will have its results when he who perpetrated will himself have forgotten it. I am one of those men, Lorenzo; and, though I speak not often of myself, I would have you know it. But let us talk of other things," he added in a less severe and serious tone. "Now tell me truly, did you not think when I told Leonora to come on to Rome that I had changed my purposes towards yourself, or that, at least, they were shaken; that some more wealthy match presented itself, or some ambitious object led me to withdraw my approbation of your suit? You doubted, you feared—was it not so?"

As he spoke another personage entered the room with a gliding but stately step. He was dressed richly in a morning robe of precious furs, and his remarkably handsome person was set off to every advantage by the arrangement of the hair, the beard, and the garb. Ramiro d'Orco only noticed his coming by rising and inclining his head, while the other cast himself gracefully down upon the pile of cushions, and began to eat some confections which he took from a small golden box.

Almost without pause, Ramiro proceeded, "Did you not think so? You were wrong, Lorenzo, if you did. I have consented to your marriage with my daughter, I wish your marriage with her. I here, in the presence of this noble Prince, give my full consent, and had you brought her on here, I would have joined your hands ere you go hence. But it is well as it is. And now let us again to other objects; my lord Cardinal, your Eminence wished to see my young friend here."

"He is very handsome," said Cæsar Borgia;

for he it was who lay upon the cushions. "He is very handsome, and I am told that the Signora Leonora is very beautiful, too—nay, a marvel of loveliness—is it not so?"

"In my eyes certainly," said Lorenzo drily; for there was something in the tone of the man he did not like.

"Marry her soon—marry her soon," said Cæsar Borgia, "a peach should always be tasted ere it is too ripe. I envy you your privileges, sir. I who am bound to a sour life of celibacy, may well think you happy who are free and blessed."

Lorenzo rose and raised his bonnet from the floor where he had cast it, as if to depart.

"Stay, stay," said Ramiro d'Orco "these French bred gentlemen, my lord Cardinal, are very touchy upon some points. They understand no jests where their lady loves are concerned. We in Italy, and especially you in Rome, are somewhat too light tongued upon such matters."

"Well then let us talk of other things," cried Borgia, starting up with a look entirely changed,

the soft indolent, almost effeminate expression gone, the eye fiery and the lips stern and grim. "You are right, Ramiro: we are too light tongued in such matters. I meant not to offend you, sir, but as yet you are unaccustomed to our manners here. I wished to see and speak with you from the reports I have heard of you. You have, I think, served the king of France well—marvellously well for one so young. I have heard of your doings at Vivizano, and I have heard moreover that you are high in the personal esteem of Charles of France himself. Nay, more, it seems, by what means I know not, but they must be extraordinary, for scripture says the deaf adder stoppeth her ears and will not hear the voice of the charmer—it seems, I say, that by some means, you have won the confidence of Julian of Rovera, an enemy of me and of my father's house. With both this Cardinal and this king you must have opportunities of private communication."

He kept his eye fixed upon Lorenzo's face while he spoke, marking every change of ex-

pression, and probably adapting his discourse to all he saw there; for no man was ever more terribly endowed with that serpent power of persuasion which bends and alters the wills and opinions of others, not by opposing force to force, but by instilling our thoughts in the garb of theirs into the minds of even our opponents. By that power how many did he bring to destruction, how many did he lure to death!

"I wish not," he continued, "to lead you to do or say aught that can be prejudicial to the King of France. I know that you are incapable of it; but it is for that very reason I have desired to see you. I seek no communication with those whom I can buy, and who the day after will sell themselves to another. I desire to address myself to one eager to serve his lord, and who will dare to tell him the truth, even if it be first spoken by the mouth of an enemy. Such a man I believe you to be, Signor Visconti, and therefore I sought this interview. Now, sir, King Charles is surrounded with men who will not let the truth reach his ears. You may ask

why? what is their object? I will tell you. They have Rome in their power. My father, it is true, is safe up there—but still Rome is theirs; and, if they can but prevail upon the King of France, by false statements—by cunning persuasions—by the suppression or distortion of facts—to use his advantage ungenerously, they calculate upon forcing his Holiness to buy them wholesale. Ay, buy them, sir; for there are not two in all the King's council who cannot be bought—by benefices, by gold, by estates, by dignities. This is the reason they keep the truth from the monarch's mind; for they well know that, if his position and his duties were once clearly stated to him, full peace and alliance would soon be re-established between the crown of France and the Holy see; and they would be deprived of the power of extracting from my father the last ducat in his treasury, the last benefice in his gift. Do you understand me?"

"Methinks I do," answered Lorenzo, who had seen good reason to believe that Borgia's

view of the characters of the French counsellors was not far from the truth. "But what is it, your Eminence, that the King of France should know that he does not know? He has about his person many a clear-sighted military man who is competent to perceive the truth and too honest to conceal it."

"Not exactly, my young friend," replied the Cardinal; "the truth is not always so easy a thing to find as you imagine. The negociators, at all events, have the King's ear—civilians or ecclesiastics—all. We know not that these military friends of yours have discovered the whole truth; or, if they have, that they have revealed it. Now, what I wish is, that you—you, Lorenzo Visconti, should learn the whole truth, and should seize the very first opportunity of telling it to the King. I will give you a correct and accurate statement of the true position of affairs—at least, as I see them. If I am wrong, your own clear mind will detect the error: for, of course, though I cannot pretend to speak without some prejudice, you can

have none. An Italian by birth—about to wed an Italian lady, many of your sympathies must be with us, while gratitude and education afford a fair counterpoise in favor of France. But listen to my statement."

He then went on with the most skilful and artful, but apparently the most unpremeditated eloquence, to set before the young knight a totally different view of the questions between Alexander and the King of France. He dwelt long and severely upon the scandal to all Christendom exhibited by the eldest son of the Church—a title of which French monarchs had ever been proud—forcing his way into the holy city, contrary to the repeated injunctions of the Church's head. He asked if it were the part of one who pretended and hoped to drive back the wave of Mahommedan invasion from Europe and plant the Cross itself in Constantinople, to commence his enterprise by setting at naught the power and authority of the Vicar of Christ, driving him from his home to take refuge in a fortress, to despoil him of his means and to

trample on his dignity. "They speak ill of his Holiness, indeed," continued Borgia, "they calumniate him and misrepresent all that he does. Let us even admit, however, all that they say against him, that he has the passions which afflict all men of ardent temperaments—that he has at times indulged the propensities common to all men—that he has done openly, in short, and without hypocrisy, all that his predecessors have done covertly and hypocritically—that he calls his son his son, and not his nephew—never forgetting, however, that all these faults occurred before his elevation to the holy see; but granting all, admitting every charge, I will ask you, Lorenzo, if these faults of the man, which affect not the holy office, are so great a scandal to the Church as to see the first of—I had almost said pretended—the first of Christian monarchs set at naught the authority, oppress the person, and plunder the property of the representative of the apostles? But I have dwelt too long upon this aspect of the question. Perhaps it does not affect you.

it may not affect the King of France, and I did not intend to speak of it at length. I meant to deal with the political view of the case—of that which touches the King's material interests, and I now turn to that."

The bright, comprehensive, and sagacious picture which he now drew of the actual position, and future prospects of the King of France was perhaps unequalled by any of the most splendid efforts of the man with whom Macchioavelli himself found it hard to cope; and well might one so young and inexperienced as Lorenzo have been carried away by his eloquence, even if there had not been much truth in the details, much accuracy in the reasoning. But there was far more of both than of falsehood or rhetoric. He stripped the position of the King of France from its fictitious splendour: he painted him as in the midst of a foreign country, with no communications open behind him, without a fleet, and with an exhausted treasury, without a sincere friend in Italy, with a resolute enemy before him, and without one faithful ally behind.

He showed and asserted he could prove that Ludovico Sforza was busily weaving the web of a confederation against him; that the Duke of Ferrara was already gained; that the Venetians were arming in haste, and that Florence was eager to avenge the humiliation she had received, by giving aid to the league; that even the Emperor and the King of Spain, though bought off for a time by sacrifices disastrous to France, showed signs already of wavering in their faith to the young king, and were only true to their policy of treachery.

"This splendid army will melt away," he continued, "by battle and disease; while that of the league against you will increase every hour. Where will you draw reinforcements; how will they reach you if they can be raised at all. To your enemies men will flow in from every quarter, and will find all roads open. The remnants of the great companies will easily be gathered together, all men practised in warfare under leaders of consummate skill. The Albanian bands of the Venetians will sweep the country of

its provisions, and put a desert between you and France. What the sword spares, famine and pestilence will slay, and an expedition begun with festivals and successes will end in disaster and tears.

“Show me where I am wrong, and I will admit it; but this, Signor Visconti, is my view, and I give it to you plainly and sincerely. Now you may ask what I would deduce from all this? —that the King of France should desist from his enterprise, and return with defeat and disgrace to his own land? Far from it; I would have him push on to Naples with all rapidity, before the plans of his enemies are mature, or their preparations made. He may subdue that kingdom rapidly, and with the command of the sea coast, and a new and defensible position set his foes at defiance till his army can be recruited and reinforced. But I would not have him stay here and waste time, every moment of which is precious; in trying to humble a pontiff whom he is bound to reverence, or destroy a sovereign who is ready to be his friend. If such madness seizes him he

is lost. How much better, at no loss of honor or of interest, but merely by that reverence for the church, which, as a christian king, he is bound to show—how much better to have a friendly power, though perhaps a weak one, between him and the enemies in his rear!”

“But what surety has the King that this will prove a friendly power,” asked Lorenzo, “that these Roman states—this very city will not be armed against him as soon as he has passed on?”

“The Pope will give him securities,” said Caesar Borgia, promptly, although a slight shade had come over his brow while the young man spoke. “He shall have ample guarantees; such fortresses to hold as will ensure him against that danger; and as for myself, I care not if I go as a hostage with his forces.”

Lorenzo paused, and thought without reply, and Borgia added, “Nay more, Zizim shall be given into his hands, though perchance that act may bring down the wrath of Bajazet upon Italy,

and we may again see our coasts ravaged by Turkish fleets."

"And who is Zizim?" asked Lorenzo, in surprise.

"It matters not," replied Borgia, "but whisper that name in the King's ear—only say you have somewhat to tell him regarding Zizim, and he will give eager audience to all the rest."

"But I must also tell him on what authority I speak," said Lorenzo.

"Do so!" exclaimed Cæsar Borgia, at once, "let him know that you have seen me in company with this good lord who sits silent here, who knows the truth of every word I speak."

"I do," said Ramiro d'Orco; "and moreover as you may want proof of the corruption in the King's council you have heard of, give this small packet, my son, to the good Bishop of St. Malo—not before you have conferred with the King, but afterwards—not when the worthy Prelate has company around him; but when he is quite alone."

Lorenzo took the small paper packet which Ramiro held out, not without some doubts; but it contained something hard and bulky, and evidently was not a letter, of which he might have hesitated to be the bearer. "Well," he said, at length, "I presume, sir, that you would not put upon me any unbecoming task. But your Eminence spoke something regarding the Cardinal of St. Peter. What do you desire that I should say to him?" he continued, addressing Borgia.

A sort of spasm passed over Cæsar's face, and he kept his teeth firmly pressed together for a moment; but when he answered it was with a calm, though stern voice, "Tell him that no Cardinal who dethrones a supreme Pontiff ever becomes Pope. His holy brethren know him too well. That is all I have to say to him—and now my task is over," he continued, throwing himself back upon the cushions, "let us taste some wine. Will you drink, Signor Lorenzo?"

The young lord excused himself, and shortly after took his leave.

"Too young, I fear me," said Ramiro d'Orco, as Visconti quitted the room.

"All the better," replied Borgia, languidly, "we must work with all kinds of tools, according to our objects, Ramiro—women, valets, boys, wise men. A wise man would not suit me now, for he would conceal half that he has heard. This youth will tell it all, and that is what I desire."

CHAPTER VII.

WHILE the conversation which I have narrated in the preceding chapter was going on in the rooms above, one of a very different character, though relating to the same topic, took place below. We need not be very long detained in its detail, but there were certain parts therein which must be related. The scene was a small room near that sort of buttery window at which Italian nobles have in all times been accustomed to sell or retail the produce of their estates. The interlocutors were our friend Antonio and the pretended friar Mardocchi, and after the first greetings, the substantial conversation began, by the former gently reproaching him of

whom he had aided to cheat the cord, with not having visited him when in the French camp at Vivizano.

"Ah! how did you know I was there?" asked Mardocchi. "Why, I was only one night in all."

"I know every thing that happens within a hundred miles of me," replied Antonio, who had discovered the great benefit of assuming more knowledge than he possessed, "you had not been five minutes in the camp before I knew it. But why did you not come."

"I have told you already," answered Mardocchi. "I was but one night in the camp, and I got such rough usage from that old Cardinal of the Devil, that I was glad to get out by day-break."

"Ay, he has no smooth tongue, I wot," answered Antonio; "if he licks his cubs with that when they are born, they will go into the world skinless. But how liked the excellent Signor Ramiro the answer he got to his letter?"

"I know little of his liking," answered the

other. "He is not like my good deceased Lord Buondoni, who would tell me this or that, or swear or stamp in my presence as if there were no one there but himself. This man keeps all, or thinks he keeps all, to himself; but one thing I have found out, and that I like him for, because in that he is like myself. If a man does him a good turn he never forgets it; and if a man does him an injury he does not forget that either."

"I suppose not," replied Antonio. "he is a good lord in many things, and all the wiser for keeping his secrets to himself. In all the world he cannot find any one who can keep them as well. Then he did not show any anger when he found the Signor Leonora was not coming?"

"Not a whit," answered Mardocchi; "he only said, 'it is well; it is very well.'"

The conversation was then turned to other subjects by Antonio demanding if his companion did not think that the Signor Ramiro had laid his egg in a wrong nest when he attached himself to the Borgias.

"Not at all," answered Mardocchi; "they are men who are not afraid of doing anything; if one way does not answer they take another; and such men are sure to succeed."

He then went on to give his view of the situation of the Pope and the King of France, to which Antonio, who had come for the purpose of learning all he could, listened attentively. It was somewhat different from the view of Cæsar Borgia, and to say the truth, somewhat more extended; for he contemplated amongst the Pope's resources both poison and the dagger. Indeed, he had not studied under Buondoni without improvement; for he clearly showed Antonio that it would be perfectly possible to destroy almost all the King's army in Rome by poisoning the wells.

"But, good Heaven! you would poison all the people likewise!" cried Antonio.

"And no great harm either," said Mardocchi, gruffly: "did you not hear how the beasts last night were cheering and vivaing those French heretics? But if the Holy Father in his mercy

chose to spare them, he could easily do it by sending the monks and priests amongst them to tell them which wells were poisoned and which not."

"I forgot that," said Antonio, "and the scheme does seem a feasible one. But I hope, my dear friar, that if you have recourse to it, you will let me know where it is safe to drink. I, in return, will promise that when those who are left of the French army—for I must tell you that one half of them have had no knowledge of water since their baptism—when those that remain sack and fire the city, I will bring you out as my own particular friend, and save you from being impaled or burned. These French gentlemen who drink nothing but wine are not tender, I can tell you, and if they found their friends die poisoned, you would soon see a Pope dancing in the middle of a bonfire, and the whole College of Cardinals writhing upon lance heads."

"Oh! they will not try the trick," said Mardocchi, with a countenance somewhat fallen, "at least, they would try all other measures first. I

doubt not that if His Holiness will give up Zizim to King Charles that will settle all differences."

"And who is Zizim?" asked Antonio.

"Why, do you not know?" exclaimed Mardocchi; "that shows the King's secrets are well kept in his own camp. Hark ye!" and lowering his voice he went on to explain to his companion not only who the unfortunate Zizim was, but the object which the King of France was supposed to have in view in seeking to obtain possession of his person. The tale was full of scandal to Christian ears, but seemed to shock Mardocchi not in the least; and as it was somewhat long, as he told it, it shall be abridged for the reader's benefit. Zizim was the brother of the Sultan Bajazet, some indeed say, his elder brother. At all events he was his competitor for the throne of Turkey. Their respective claims had been settled for a time at least by arms. Zizim defeated, was fortunate enough to escape from the vengeful policy of the Ottoman race, and first took refuge, it would seem, with the Knights

of St. John at Rhodes. He thence sailed to France, and appeared for a short time at the court of Charles. The Pope, however, who was alternately the ally and enemy of every prince around him, at that time actually contemplated a new crusade, and believed, or affected to believe that Zizim, appearing in his brother's territories, supported by a considerable force, might subserve his plans, by destroying the Ottoman dominions, This at least was his excuse for inviting the unhappy Prince from Paris to Rome. Charles consented to his departure, but upon the express stipulation that Alexander should give him up to France whenever he was required. With the usual mutability of the Papal councils at that time, however, but a few months elapsed ere Alexander was the friend and ally of Bajazet and the life of Zizim was placed in no slight peril. Charles had in vain required that the Pope should fulfil his engagement by sending the Turkish Prince back to France. It must not, however, be supposed that the French king was actuated solely by compassion for the unfortu-

nate exile. He too had ambitious ends to attain, and he too imagined that Zizim might assist in the execution of his schemes. History leaves no doubt that the conquest of Naples, though the primary, was not the ultimate object of Charles's expedition into Italy. The wildest of chimeras possessed his brain, and he imagined that the whole Turkish empire was destined to fall before his inefficient means and inexperienced sword. Naples was to be, in fact, but a step to Constantinople. Flatterers and poets combined to raise the young king's vain intoxication to the highest pitch, and we find one of the latter singing of the conquest of Turkey as an event almost accomplished.

The Pope, however, had very different views. So long as he detained the Turkish prince in a sort of honourable imprisonment, a pension of forty thousand gold ducats was his from Bajazet, and as soon as he thought fit to capitulate that annuity by putting Zizim to death, three hundred thousand ducats were promised to him. To take the prince from him was like tearing out his en-

trails; but upon that point Charles was resolute, and Mardocchi, as well as Cardinal Borgia, was wise enough to see that the time was come when the monarch's demand must be granted.

Such was the tale which had been poured into Antonio's ear, when steps were heard slowly descending the great staircase, and, on looking out, he perceived his young lord just about to issue from the gates.

So deep was the fit of thought into which all he had heard and seen that morning had thrown Lorenzo, that he was not aware for some time that Antonio was near him. He turned over and over in his mind the statements of Cardinal Borgia. He tried to discover a flaw in his reasoning—an improbability in his assertions; but all was reasonable, all was probable; and the peril to the king and his army was so clear that he felt himself bound, even at the risk of being thought intrusive, to lay the whole picture, which had been given him, before the monarch.

From such thoughts he turned to the consideration of the character of Borgia himself. Strange to say, although he had been at first both offended and disgusted by the cardinal's demeanour, the impression now was favourable rather than otherwise. Indeed, such was the case with all men brought for any length of time under his fascination. The most clear-sighted, the most wise, those who knew him best, those who had most cause to shun and dread him, fell an easy prey to his serpent tongue, if once they could be brought to listen. Witness the Vitelli and the Orsini, Gravina, and Oliverotto da Fermo, all led to death by his specious eloquence.

It is no wonder that one with so little experience as Lorenzo, and who had no reason to fear or doubt him, but the vague rumours and insinuations which were current in the various cities through which he had lately passed, should feel the influence of his extraordinary powers when brought to bear upon him.

"It is a pity," he thought "that a man of such

boundless energy and ability, should give himself up at any time to the effeminate and luxurious habits which he seems to indulge in when not roused to action."

But Lorenzo little dreamed that the effeminate and luxurious habits went hand in hand with the darkest vices and the most fearful crimes. The character of the man might puzzle him: it might, and did perhaps, inspire doubt and even suspicion; but the doubt was unmingled with horror, the suspicion had no definite form.

He was still deep in thought when a voice close behind him, said:

"You are going wrong, my lord, if you are seeking either your own quarters or the king's."

"Oh, is that you, Antonio?" said Lorenzo; "I did not know you were so near. Which way then?"

"To the right, my lord," replied the man; "but indeed, my lord, in this city you should always know who is so close behind you. I have

been within stiletto length of you for the last ten minutes."

"But no one will try to hurt me here, Antonio," said his lord. "Ay, here we are! Glide quickly in, see if you can ascertain whether the king has heard mass yet, and if he has, find out if he is alone."

Antonio passed the guard and entered the palace, while Lorenzo spoke a few words with the officer on duty. In a minute or two the man returned, and answered that the king was quite alone.

"He is waiting for the bishop in his cabinet," said Antonio, "but the prelate is always either long at his sleep or at his prayers, and the chamberlain says he won't be there this half-hour."

"Wait here for me, then," said Lorenzo, and entered.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE young king of France sat in a small room dressed in a gown of black velvet, with a bonnet or toque upon his head, for the winters were now cold, and, to tell the truth, Roman houses were then, as now, better fitted for the summer than the winter months of the year. Beside him stood Lorenzo Visconti, listening rather than speaking; for although, when he craved through the chamberlain a private audience, he had said that he had matters of great moment to communicate to the monarch, Charles, as was not unusual with him, had begun the conversation with tales of his own griefs and annoyances.

"Upon my life, Visconti," he said, "I am of

the mind to trust old men no more, for what they have in wisdom and experience is drowned in selfishness and ambition. A very young man may be a fool, but he is rarely a scoundrel; and it is a sad thing, cousin, to be always doubting whether a man in a gray beard is advising you for your interest or his own. Look you now! they promised me that if I but entered Rome, the Pope would be brought to terms at once; and now there he sits up in the castle there, looking down upon us like an eagle from his eyrie, without showing one sign of a desire to treat. I have ordered ten bombards to be brought to the bridge and pointed at the gates, and, on my life, they shall fire unless he shews signs of life before noon."

"I think, sire," replied Lorenzo, "you will not have to give the order. His holiness may have shown no open signs of a desire to treat, but he seems of your majesty's opinion, that young men are the best counsellors. In a word, sire, I have had a long interview, unsought and unexpected, with Cardinal Borgia this morning,

and it is on that account I have intruded on you thus early."

Charles's attention was now fully aroused. "What!" he exclaimed, "have you been admitted to the castle?"

"No, sire," answered Lorenzo; "I last night received a note from Signor Ramiro d'Orco, appointing a place of meeting, and, judging that his object had reference solely to his daughter, I went. We had not conversed five minutes when we were joined by the Cardinal Don Cæsar Borgia, and he gave me, expressly for your majesty's hearing, his views of the state of affairs in Italy, and hinted very distinctly what are the terms which his holiness is inclined to concede."

"Speak! speak! tell me all!" cried the king. "By heaven, I hope we shall not be interrupted. Call in the chamberlain or his page. That bishop comes here about this hour; he should, indeed, be here now; but he is somewhat negligent and unpunctual. He shall have to wait, however,

for I will not admit him till your tale is done."

The chamberlain was called in, the king's orders given not to admit even his council, and Lorenzo went on to tell his tale. His memory was good, the words of Cæsar Borgia had impressed themselves deeply on his mind, and Charles lost hardly anything by hearing from another mouth.

The monarch was evidently much struck with the new view of his own situation now presented to him. The old adage that "one story is good till another is told," is constantly applicable to every view we take of ourselves, our fate, our circumstances. Whoever told the other story, it would always be found very different from our own. Charles paused long and meditated in silence. His was neither a quick nor a comprehensive mind: and when the golden visions of glory and ambition have once entered into the brain, it is difficult to displace them; but yet he saw obstacles he had never dreamed of, impediments

which had been suggested neither by his own judgment nor by the sagacity of his counsellors, dangers which were more than probable, imminent, and menacing. His courage was too great, his ambition too deeply engaged, his honour too much implicated for him to recede from his enterprise against Naples. But he saw strong good sense in the plan suggested and the advice given by Cardinal Borgia, and he concluded that they would not be furnished by an enemy, or that if they were, they could not be furnished in an inimical spirit.

He pondered these matters more at length, and perhaps more profoundly than he had ever considered anything before. Steps were heard in the adjoining chamber, a hand was placed upon the latch, words were spoken, some in a tone of remonstrance, and some almost in that of anger, but they did not rouse the young king from his reverie.

At length the king woke, as if he had suddenly come to some resolution. "I will demand only what must absolutely be granted," he said, look-

ing up—"only what is absolutely needful. We must not, by asking too much, risk the loss of all. Now tell me, cousin—you alluded to certain conditions to which the cardinal said his uncle or, rather, his father, would agree. Let me know them distinctly, and be sure that you remember them aright."

Lorenzo repeated as closely as possible the words of Cæsar Borgia, giving something even of his manner and intonation. The king listened with fixed attention; but when Lorenzo came to that part of the offer by which it was promised that Zizim should be given into Charles's hands, the words did not produce the effect which the young knight had expected. The monarch remained almost entirely unmoved; the vision of Constantinople had passed away. In showing him his real situation at that actual moment, Borgia had taught the young king the vanity of his schemes for the future.

"Well, then," said Charles, when Lorenzo had concluded, "almost all is offered which I could reasonably demand. There is only one thing left

vague, and that is the security to be given that the Roman territory shall be kept open when it either suits me to return or when I see fit to bring reinforcements from France; but the details of that question can be settled by negotiators on both parts. It may give my ministers an opportunity of making something for themselves, and when it can be done with honour, my good cousin, I do not object to advance the interests of those who serve me well."

"Perhaps this little packet, sire, may serve to smooth the way with your majesty's ministers," said Lorenzo; "I promised to give it to my reverend lord the Bishop of St. Malo some time when he was alone if I could, but I did not engage not to ask your majesty's permission."

"Oh, give it to him, give it to him," said the good-humoured king; "but he should have been here long ere this. He is becoming sadly tardy."

"I think, sire, he has already come, but your majesty ordered no one to be admitted."

"True! true!" replied Charles. "Well, then, go, good cousin, take him aside, and give him the packet; then send him in to speak with me."

Lorenzo, as he expected, found the king's minister in the antechamber; but the good bishop was in no very placable mood. He eyed the young cavalier, as he came forth from the king's closet, with a glance that can only be given by a courtier who sees another receive high honor from his sovereign, and he had almost turned on his heel when Lorenzo approached him.

"I wish to speak with you alone for a moment, my lord bishop," said the young man, respectfully.

"I cannot imagine what you can have to say to me, Signor Visconti, nor with the king either," said the minister, tartly; "but, as I have been kept long enough among pages, I may as well gratify you. This way, sir."

Lorenzo followed him with a smile, and the

bishop led him to a vacant chamber, saying, as soon as they entered, "Now, sir?"

"I have the honor, my lord," said Lorenzo, "of delivering this into your hands from Cardinal Borgia—"

"Who! what!" exclaimed the prelate, interrupting him, in a tone greatly altered.

"He directed me, reverend sir," continued the young man, not noticing his exclamations, "to place the packet in your hands when you were alone. This must plead my excuse for so venturing to occupy your time and detaining you from the king."

But before Lorenzo had finished the sentence the bishop had torn open the packet, and was gazing in admiration at what it contained. Lorenzo did not wonder at the surprise and satisfaction which had shown themselves on the prelate's face when he saw in his hands the largest and most beautiful diamond he had ever beheld, except among the jewels of the King of France. But there was something more; for the

bishop gazed at some words written in the cover, and he murmured, loud enough to be heard "And a cardinal's hat!" Apparently that was all that was written, for he repeated the words again, "And a cardinal's hat! I understand."

Those few words were quite sufficient, however, for Cæsar Borgia knew his man, and was aware that no long explanations were needed.

Lorenzo was then about to retire, but the bishop stopped him with a very gracious look, saying, "Stay, Signor Visconti, stay! Then you know his Eminence, and have seen him lately."

"My lord, I must not detain you with explanations," said Lorenzo, "for I know his majesty wishes to consult you on matters of deep importance."

"At all events, I trust, from your bringing me this little token," said the bishop, moving toward the door, "that, notwithstanding your

intimacy with the Cardinal of St. Peter's, you are not one of those who will counsel the king to deal hardly with the Holy See."

"My counsel will never be asked, my lord bishop," replied the young nobleman, walking by his side; "but if it were, I should undoubtedly advise his majesty to come to an accommodation with his holiness as speedily as possible, and upon as generous terms as may be compatible with his own dignity and security."

"That is well! that is well!" said the bishop, with a gratified smile. "My son, you have my benediction. Blessed be the peace-makers."

Thus ended their interview; but the following day, to his great surprise, Lorenzo found that the bishop had requested to have his presence at a conference with some negotiators on the part of the Pope, alleging that it would be better to have the assistance of some Italian gentleman.

In truth, several military men had been

joined with him in the commission, and the good prelate feared that counsels opposite to his own wishes might prevail unless he had the support of some one of whose opinions he had made sure.

The negotiations were not so soon or so easily terminated as either Lorenzo or the king had expected. Though Cæsar Borgia for once acted in good faith, the Pope vacillated and delayed, and the subject of the military guarantees was attended with great difficulties.

At length, however, it was agreed that Civita Vecchia, Terracina, and Spoleto, together with Ostia, which would seem to have been already in his possession, should be placed in Charles's hands as security; that the solemn investiture of the kingdom of Naples should be given; that Zizim should be delivered to him; and that Cardinal Borgia should accompany the royal army as a hostage.

On his part, Charles promised to show every outward sign of obedience and submission to the

Holy See; and Alexander returned to the Vatican to receive the homage of the King of France for the kingdom of Naples, and to enjoy an apparent triumph over him who had invaded his dominions, set at nought his authority, and driven him from his palace.

CHAPTER IX.

NOTHING can be more evanescent than the impressions of reason on a small mind. That of Charles VIII. might almost be compared to a looking glass; it reflected only that which was before it; and, ere the conditions of accommodation between himself and the Pope were completely arranged, he had forgotten his desire to march on speedily—he had forgotten the extreme peril of not doing so

A whole month passed in fêtes and ceremonies, and found the French monarch and his army still in Rome; but there were persons in his camp and court both wiser and more impatient, and at

length he was induced to name the day of departure.

Again he commenced his advance, with troops refreshed, and all the pageantry of war renewed and brightened. The order of march was made as it had been before; a few small bodies of cavalry in advance, then the Swiss and Gascon foot, then the great body of men-at-arms, and lastly, at some distance in the rear, the household of the king, escorted by his own guard, and followed by an immense train of courtiers, servants, and attendants.

In this part of the cavalcade appeared two groups of peculiar interest. Mounted on a splendid charger, and attired more like a warrior than a churchman, came the Cardinal Borgia, the hostage for the Pope. An enormous train followed him, more in number, indeed, than that which attended upon the king. Led horses, with their grooms, mules and pack-saddles, litters, with curtains of crimson and gold, in which, it was whispered, were some of the flowers of the Cardinal's seraglio, an im-

mense quantity of baggage drawn slowly on in ox-carts, and a number of men on foot, tolerably well armed for the attendance of a cardinal, followed him in the march, and made his part of the cavalcade as brilliant as any other.

Still farther in the rear appeared a somewhat lugubrious troop, at the head of which was borne a square black banner on a gilded pole. Then came litter after litter with black curtains, followed by a small body of mounted men, whose turbans and cimeters betokened the race from which they sprang.

In the front litter, the curtains of which were in part drawn back, might be seen a man about the middle age, somewhat large and heavy in figure, but with a mild, intelligent face. This was the unfortunate Zizim, the brother of Bajazet, who followed the King of France rather as a guest than a prisoner, but who well knew that he was no more the master of his own actions than if there had been manacles on his wrists. Yet there was hope in his heart—hope which had not tenanted it

for many a long month. He knew, indeed, that he was to be subservient to the will of a powerful monarch, but he knew also that, in the coming struggle, when, supported by French troops, he was to shake the throne of his brother, there was a chance, and a good one, of recovering what he rightly or wrongly considered as his own. His family followed in the litters behind him; and a few faithful servants and attendants, who shared his fortunes in good and evil, made up the rest of the band.

With drums, and trumpets, and banners flying, and nodding plumes, and all the pomp and pageantry of war, the French army marched forward, while the first breath of spring was felt in the air, and a slight filmy cloud here and there in the sky promised, like the hopes of youth, an early enjoyment of summer long before, in reality, it approached. Mirth and laughter reigned in the ranks of the French army, and the expedi-

tion seemed more like an excursion of pleasure than a great military enterprise.

The day's march was somewhat long, all though it did not commence very early; but Charles had suddenly re-awakened to the necessity of reaching Naples speedily; and even the sluggish Duke of Montpensier, who rarely rose before noon-day, was eager to get forward, and had been in the saddle by nine.

At length the halt was ordered; lodgings were found in a small village for the king and the principal personages who attended him; tents were pitched in the fields and groves around; and, after one of those scenes of indescribable bustle and confusion which always attend the first night's encampment of an army, the gay French soldiery gave themselves up to revelry and merriment.

Couriers came from Rome during the evening, bringing delicious wines and delicacies as presents from Pope Alexander to the king; and, although it was somewhat dangerous to

eat of his meat or drink of his cup, let it be said, none of the French court was injured that day by the bounties he provided.

On the following morning the march recommenced in the same order; the encampment again took place at night; the night passed away; but, while the army was getting under arms in the early morning, it was found that two of the king's honoured guests were gone.

Cardinal Borgia, the Pope's hostage, was nowhere to be found; litters and rosy curtains, attendants on foot and on horseback, pack-horses and mules, had all disappeared, and it became very evident that Cæsar, not liking the position he occupied in the French army, had quitted it, and taken himself back to Rome.

Zizim also, the unfortunate Ottoman prince, had departed, but on a longer journey, and to a more distant land. He had been taken ill during the night; symptoms of poison had shown themselves at an early hour; the disease, whatever it was, had a rapid course,

and ere day dawned the eyes of Zizim were closed in the night of death. It was shown that messengers from his friend Pope Alexander had visited him during the preceding evening, and a thousand vague stories ran through the camp not at all complimentary to the moral character of the Pope; but Charles VIII., whatever might be his suspicions, sent back the family and the corpse of the Turkish prince to Alexander. The latter, indeed, was a valuable present, perhaps more so than any corpse ever was before or since; for, on delivering it to the agents of Bajazet, the messengers of the Pope received three hundred thousand ducats of gold, as compensation for some act faithfully performed.

These events created much surprise and some uneasiness in the court of Charles VIII. The graces, the exceeding beauty, and the winning eloquence of Cæsar Borgia had dissipated all the doubts and suspicions which, even at that early period of his life, hang

about him. At a distance, men abhorred and condemned him; once within the magic circle of his influence, fear and hatred passed away, and friendship and confidence succeeded in even the most cautious. But now, when he fled from the post he had voluntarily undertaken, when he set at naught the engagements which he had been the first to propose, suspicion was re-awakened; couriers were sent off in haste to the towns which Alexander had surrendered as securities to the king, and the officers commanding the garrisons were strictly enjoined to keep guard carefully against a surprise.

Before that day's march was ended, new causes of apprehension were added to those which already existed. Intelligence was received that Alphonzo, King of Naples, who had merited and won the hatred of his people, had abdicated in favour of his son Ferdinand, a prince universally beloved and respected. Gallant in the field, courteous and kind in his personal demeanour, constant and firm, as well as gentle, he boasted at an after period that he had never inflicted

an injury upon any of his own or his father's subjects, and there were none found to contradict.

Such a prince might be naturally expected to rally round him all that was noble, generous, and gallant among the Neapolitan people; and whatever Charles himself might think, there were many in his council who knew well how difficult a task it is to conquer a united and patriotic nation.

They heard that he had assumed the crown amidst shouts and rejoicings, that voluntary levies were swelling his forces, and that he himself had advanced to the frontier of his kingdom, and had taken up a commanding position ready to do battle in defence of his throne.

The march of the King of France became much more circumspect; parties were thrown out in different directions to obtain intelligence, and no longer with gay and joyous revelry, but with compact array and rigid discipline, the host moved forward, and passed the Neapolitan frontier.

Where was the army which was to oppose its progress? Where the numerous and zealous friends of the young sovereign? Nowhere.

Some turbulent proceedings in the city of Naples, instigated, it is supposed, by French emissaries, recalled Ferdinand for a few days to his capital. When he returned to the army, he found it nearly disbanded, terror in the hearts of those who remained, and perhaps treachery also.

There was no possibility of keeping the troops together; and with disappointment, but not with despair, Ferdinand returned to Naples, in the hope of defending the city against the invader. Vain was the hope; misfortune dogged him still.

The volatile people, who had shouted so loudly at his succession, received him in dull and ominous silence; and he soon learned that he could neither depend upon their support nor upon the fidelity of the mercenary troops with which his father had garrisoned the two great citadels. Day by day from the various

fortresses of the kingdom came warnings of what might be expected of the people of Naples.

Terrified at the approach of the French, the inhabitants of the various cities on Charles's line of march clamored for immediate surrender even before they were summoned; and the governors and garrisons only delayed that surrender till they could make a bargain with the counsellors of the French monarch, not for safety and immunity, but for payment and reward.

It was an observation of the cunning Breconnel, that golden bullet shattered down more walls in the kingdom of Naples than any of the bombards of the army; but, as the finances of Charles were not very flourishing, he was obliged to be lavish of promises when he could not pay in money.

But I must follow a little farther the history of the gallant prince whom the French monarch came to dethrone. Left almost alone in his palace, Ferdinand saw nothing around him but

desertion and treachery—heard of nothing but plots against his person or his power. Calmly, deliberately he took his resolution. He selected several vessels in the harbour, manned them with persons on whom he could rely, and then addressed the people of Naples, telling them, in a speech which may be apocryphal, but which is full of calm dignity and noble courage, that it was his intention to leave the capital.

He told them that he was ready to fight with them and for them, but that the cowardice of the soldiery and treachery of their leaders deprived him of the hope of success. He advised them, as soon as he was gone to treat with France; he set them free from their allegiance to him; he exhorted them to live peacefully under their new lord. But he told them that he would ever be near them, and promised that, should the yoke of the stranger ever become insupportable, they would find him by their side, ever ready to shed his last drop of blood for their deliverance.

"In my exile," he said, "it will be some consolation to me if you allow that since my birth I have never injured any one of you, that I have done my best to render you happy, and that it is not by my own fault that I have lost a throne."

Some of the people wept, we are told, but the rest stole away to the palace, and at once commenced the work of pillage. Ferdinand drove them out at the point of the sword; but, finding that the garrison of Castel Nuovo had already conspired to seize his person and sell him to the French, he hurried on board his ships with a few friends, set fire to the rest of the vessels in the harbour, and sailed for the Island of Ischia.

There a new trait of human baseness awaited him. The governor of the island and of an old castle, built, as is said, by the Saracens, which then stood on the island, attempted to parly with the prince to whom he owed all, refusing to receive him with more than one attendant. Ferdinand sprang ashore alone, seized the villain by the throat, and, casting him under his feet, tram-

pled upon him in presence of his own forces and the garrison. The castle was soon in his possession, but he remained not long in Ischia.

On the 21st February, 1495, the French monarch approached the city of Naples. The gates were thrown open, the streets hung with tapestry, the windows crowded with admiring groups, and Charles entered, as if in triumph, with an imperial crown upon his head, a sceptre in one hand, and a globe in the other, while heralds proclaimed him emperor, though it does not appear that they said of what empire.

The mercurial population went half wild with excitement, and shouted, and danced, and screamed before his horse's feet; and had Charles been St. Januarius himself, Naples could not have roared with more lusty joy.

Yet the two castles still held out, the one merely to make conditions for the benefit of the garrison, the other from nobler motives. The Castel Nuovo was bought and sold without a shot being fired; but in the Ovo was Frederick, the

uncle of the dethroned king, and a faithful garrison. The French artillery advanced and opened fire; the guns of the castle replied boldly. Some damage was done in the city, and it became evident that many of the finest buildings might be destroyed.

Negotiation was then commenced, and to Frederick's high honour be it said, that he sought no terms for himself, although he knew that the castle could not hold out many days. It was his nephew alone that he thought of; and he strove hard to persuade the king of France to bestow upon Ferdinand the duchy of Calabria on condition of his abdicating the throne; but the council of the king would not consent to leave so popular a competitor in Italy. They offered large possessions in France, and drew out the negotiations to such a length, that Frederick, finding the Ovo could hold out no longer, withdrew with a small body of men, and, joining his nephew, took refuge with him in Ischia.

The city of Naples was now completely in the

power of the French, but the kingdom was not so. Scattered over its various provinces were many strong places. Brindisi, Otranto, Regio, Gallipoli, held out for the house of Arragon, and the governors, too honest or too wise, would not suffer themselves to be corrupted. The French army, holding already several fortresses in Naples and the States of the Church, could not afford men enough either to form the regular siege of any of those places, or to garrison them if taken; and Charles and his court gave themselves up to all those enjoyments for which the City of the Siren has always been renowned.

CHAPTER X:

IN a small but richly-decorated room in Naples sat three gentlemen in the picturesque, the beautiful costume of the times. Two were mere youths compared with the other, and yet he was a man far on the sunny side of middle age. Before them was a table bearing upon it dried fruits and some wine; and many vases of fair flowers were placed upon the board and in different angles of the chamber. The expression on the countenance of each was somewhat grave, but it was more striking on that of the elder man, as his face and features were, even when at rest, of a playful turn, gay, frank, and beaming.

"I do not like this, my young friends," he said, in a very serious tone, "I do not like this at all," and he drank off another silver cupful of the wine.

"You seem to like it well, Seigneur de Vitry," said one of the young men—"that is to say, if you mean the wine; you have drunk more than I have ever seen you drink before."

"I have the drunkard's ever ready excuse, De Terrail," answered De Vitry; "I drink to drive away care. But I did not mean the wine; it is good enough, I believe. What I meant was, I do not like this state of affairs here in Naples, and I asked you two boys to dine with me to talk with you about it. Why, I believe we three seated here are the only men left reasonable in this city—the only three Frenchman I should have said; but that will not do either, for one of us is not a Frenchman by birth; at all events, I may say the only three of the king's army.

"As for these Neapolitans they are, I believe, all born mad, so there is no use taking them into the account at all. Now Lorenzo is reasonable.

He is in love; it is the most sobering thing in the world. I am reasonable from perhaps somewhat the same cause; but as to you, De Terrail, I do not understand how you came to retain your senses when men with white beards lose theirs, unless it be something in your nature, for you are too perfect a knight not to be proud of your love, if you had one."

"Well, seigneur," replied Bayard, "it is not my place to find fault with my elders; my only business is to govern my men and my own conduct aright, but yet I cannot but say with you that I do not like this."

"And I as little as either," said Lorenzo; "his majesty surely cannot know all that is taking place here. He cannot be aware that we are daily losing both the respect and the affection of the people. Why, when first we arrived, they seemed almost ready to worship us, and now every man one meets is ready to lay his hand upon his dagger."

"Ay, that is natural and common in all countries," said De Vitry; "the common herd are

always volatile, one day bowing down to their fellow man as an idol, the next day trampling upon him as a dog. But the worst of it is, we have given them cause to change. We treat the men like dogs; we consider the women as harlots, We insult men's wives and their daughters, or do worse, and we kill the husbands and brothers, or fathers, if they show a regard for their own honour. Sometimes we get killed ourselves, it is true, and 'twere no pity if 'twas oftener, but for the thinning of the king's ranks, and there are few enough of us left, I can tell you. Then see, again how we pillage and oppress the people. Why, I came suddenly yesterday upon a fellow of a sutler taking away a poor old man's fish without payment, and the old fisherman dancing out of his skin with anguish. I had the scoundrel tied up to the strappado, and made his back acquainted with the thongs; but what did that matter, when the same thing takes place every day unpunished."

"But what you say about their women is the worst," replied Bayard; "they are naturally a

jealous people here in Naples, and we certainly do give them good cause for jealousy. We not only treat them as if we had conquered them, when, in truth, we have hardly struck a stroke or couched a lance, but as if we had made them slaves."

"We should have respected them more if they had fought us better," said Lorenzo, who had listened without seeming to attend. "Have you heard what the Pope says? He declares that King Charles has passed through Italy, not sword in hand, but chalk in hand. He means, I suppose, that we have had nothing to do but to mark out our quarters. That is a hard word for an Italian to speak or an Italian to hear."

"It is very true though, Visconti," said De Vitry. "I wonder what can have made such a change among the people. The Italian great companies used to fight us as well or better than any other men in the world."

"It was those great companies themselves which caused the decline of a warlike spirit in the land," said Lorenzo; "at least I think so,

my lord. When the prince depends for support on his throne, and the peasant for protection in his cottage, upon the hands and arms of mercenaries, the social prospects of a country are very sad. Wealth may indeed grow up, luxury extend itself, arts be cultivated; but the hardy spirit, the power of endurance, the sense of self-reliance, are gone.

"For many years, here in Italy, the great companies formed the chief dependence of Italian states, and the company of St. George was the school of Italian chivalry; but, in the meantime, the people lost their skill and their courage in war, and when those great companies melted away, as they did but a few short years ago, they felt themselves, like the Britons when abandoned by the Romans, unable to defend themselves against their enemies or to protect their friends."

"Well, really, Lorenzo, I know not how the Britons felt, or when they were abandoned by the Romans," said De Vitry, laughing. "I am no great scholar in history, but I know the Britons

make very good soldiers now, as we have felt in France. But let us talk of things not quite so far away. I fear that while we are enjoying ourselves here, and losing the love of the people, there are storms gathering in the north, which may break pretty hard upon us if we do not mind."

"I know it too well," replied Lorenzo; "I heard the facts first in Rome from Cardinal Borgia, and related the whole to the king."

"Ay, Cæsar Borgia! Cæsar Borgia!" said De Vitry. "I doubt much his good faith, and would sooner have him for an enemy than a friend."

"Why so, seigneur?" asked De Terrail. "I would always have men my friends if I can, my enemies only when I must."

"I will tell you why, good friend," answered De Vitry. "If Cæsar were my enemy, I would cut his throat in ten minutes; if he were my friend, he would poison me in five. But this matter weighs upon my mind, and I thought that perhaps you, Lorenzo, might do something to

awaken the king to the true state of affairs, being admitted so much to his privacy."

Lorenzo shook his head almost sadly, saying, "I can do nothing, my lord. As to the license of our soldiery, the king gives orders which are not obeyed, and he loves not to hear complaints. As to the menacing state of things in our rear he depends upon his Highness of Orleans being able to join us with strong reinforcements. He has already passed the Alps, I hear."

"With men enough to give us help were he with us, not to force a passage to us," said De Vitry; "and, by Heaven! it's just as well that he should not be here at present, for how the duke and the rufflers who are with him would take what has happened this morning it is hard to say."

"Why, what has happened?" asked Bayard and Lorenzo both together. "We heard of nothing particular when we rode in from Portici."

De Vitry smiled. "It is nothing very particular now-a-days," he said, "but, by my faith,

such things did not often happen when I was your age, lads. Stephen de Vese, whom we all can remember, the king's valet de chambre, has been made a duke, and has got a nice little slice of the Kingdom of Naples to make up his duchy. I wonder what will come next?"

"But the worst of all is, these witty Neapolitans know all this; and though they are very sore at seeing every office, and benefice, and confiscated estate given to Frenchmen, they laugh to see the old nobility mortified by such acts as this. One saucy fellow said that he thought the king must be a necromancer, for he changed his swine into lions."

"By my faith," said Bayard, "it does not take much to make a Neapolitan lion. Heaven forbid, however, that any of us should grumble at what the king is pleased to do. But I cannot be so grave, my lord, as you and our friend Lorenzo seem to be. The Duke of Orleans will fight his way through to us, or we to him, depend upon it. Visconti has been as sad, as solemn all day as a crow in a rain-storm."

"No, no, De Terrail," said Lorenzo, "I have neither been sad nor solemn, though a little silent, perhaps. The fact is, yesterday was the day when my messenger should have returned from Florence, and I am anxious for his arrival."

"Ay, that fellow of yours, Antonio," said De Vitry laughing, "has lost his way at length, I warrant. I had as near as possible thrown him into the river once for letting me mislead myself;" and he went on to tell the story of the broken bridge, much to the amusement of his two companions.

"Hark! there is a horse's feet coming at a gallop," said Bayard. "Nothing new going wrong, I trust!" and approaching the window, he looked out into the street; then, turning round his head, he said with a laugh, "The old story of the devil my good lords. Antonio, on my life, Lorenzo."

Lorenzo turned a little pale with very natural agitation. Since his departure from Florence he had heard naught of Leonora, and if it is terrible

even in these days of comparative security and peace, to be without intelligence of those we love—if treacherous imagination brings forth from the treasury of Nemesis all the dangers and misfortunes which surround mortal life, and pile them up on the head of the beloved, how much more dreadful must it have been in those times, when real dangers, perils, and misfortunes without number dogged the steps of every-day life, and were as glaring and apparent as the sun at noon?

It must be remembered, too, that he was very young; that his early life had been clouded with misfortune, teaching the young heart the sad lesson of apprehension; that, since fortune had smiled upon him again, he had found none to love till he had met with the dear girl who had given her whole soul to him, and to whom his whole soul had been given in return; that by the very intensity of their passion they stood, as it were, alone and separate from the rest of mankind, relying, dependent upon, and wrapped up in each other, and that for four long months they

had neither seen nor held any communication with each other. It will be easily understood how, on the return of his courier from Florence, agitation shook him to the very soul. He would gladly have started up and run down to meet the messenger; but fear of the laugh of his companions restrained him, and he sat mastering his emotions as best he could.

Antonio was not long ere he ascended, however. His horse's bridle was thrown over the hook in the wall, a few brief words with the servant in the gateway followed, and then his light, agile step was heard coming up the stairs."

"God save you, my lord!" said Antonio, entering the room, "here is a packet from your fair lady."

"Did you see her? Is she well? Is she happy?" asked Lorenzo, cutting the silken threads, which bound the letter, with his dagger.

"I did see her, my lord, and she is quite well,

but not happy, thank God!" said Antonio, in his usual quaint way.

"Not happy?" said Lorenzo, pausing just as he had begun to read; "not happy?"

"Yes, my lord, not happy. Heaven forbid that she should be over happy while you are away. Oh, she told me a long and very pitiful tale of how miserable she had been, thinking of how often you had been killed and wounded in the great battles and sieges that never took place between Rome and Naples. Seven times she dreamed you were dead, and had all the trouble of burying you over and over again."

"Hush, hush, my good friend Antonio; I am in no mood for such bantering just now," said Lorenzo, and turned to his letter again.

But the pertinacious Antonio, though he left his young lord to read, could not help pouring forth some of the joyful fun, which welled up in his heart whenever he was the bearer of good news, upon his master's young friend De Terrail.

"By the bones of St. Barnabas!" he said, "the lady was looking sad enough when I first found her out, perched up on the high terrace overlooking the Mugnione, but when she saw me, she had nearly jumped out of the window with joy. But when I told her my lord was well, and that I had brought her a letter from him, I thought she would have kissed me—all for joy too. Well, she did not, or I should not have dared to come back again, for murder and kisses will come out some way."

Lorenzo's face, as he read on, lighted up with an expression of comfort and joy such as it had not borne for many a day, and many an emotion, though all happy, passed over his countenance, like the lights and shades of a bright spring day over a sunny landscape.

At length he laid the letter on his knee with a deep sigh, and paused for a moment in thought. As for his two companions, Bayard had smiled at Antonio's description of his meeting with Leonora, but De Vitry sat grave and almost stern, with his thoughts apparently far away.

At length Lorenzo woke up from his meditations, and raised the letter, saying, "Here are some lines for you too, Seigneur De Vitry."

"Then, in the fiend's name, why did you not tell me before?" exclaimed De Vitry, with a start, and looking really angry. "Here have I been sitting this half hour envying you that letter, and you never let me know that I have a share in it. Read, read, and let me know what it is."

"Tell the Marquis de Vitry," said Lorenzo, reading, "that I have heard from my dear cousin Blanche Marie, and that she wishes to know if he wears her glove still, and what fortune it has found. She says, if he has not forgotten her, and any couriers pass by Pavia, she would fain hear of his health."

"Is that all?" exclaimed De Vitry. "Bless her dear little soul, and her beautiful eyes, that look like two blue mountain lakes reflecting heaven; I have carried her glove wherever it could gain glory; but very little of that, com-

modity is to be won in this mere marching war, and wherever it does occur, you must needs slip in, Visconti, and take it all to yourself. I shall have to cut your throat some day in order to get my own share. Well, I will write to her, though, by the Lord, it is so long since I have handled a pen, that I know not what I shall make of it. I would send a courier on purpose if I thought he could make his way through that dangerous bit between Florence and Milan."

"He could not do it, my lord," said Antonio, "for the whole country there is up in arms, and a courier known to be from the French army could not pass. I only got through as far as Florence because I had an Italian tongue in my head. I told them I was a servant of Count Ascanio Malatesta; and, whether there is such a personage or not in the world, they let me pass on account of his good name."

"Then we shall have to march back ourselves, as I always thought we should," said De Vitry, "and I shall be the bearer of my own letter."

Well, the sooner the trumpet sounds to horse the better. What say you, De Terrail?"

"The sooner the better, by all means," answered Bayard: "but let us hear a little more of this, my good friend Antonio. You must have seen a good deal by the way. Cannot you give us a notion how things are going?"

"Assuredly, my lord," replied Antonio: "I always wake with both eyes open, and sleep with only one shut. In the first place, I saw many fine men and pretty women, and many good towns and strong castles; but I remarked one thing, which was, that most of the men had harness on their backs, that the armourers' shops were very busy, and that the work the ladies liked best were embroidered scarfs and sword-knots. Moreover, in those goods towns and strong castles the masons were very busy on the outside walls, and people with teams of oxen were hauling up long tubes, and piling up heavy balls beside them.

"Then, as I passed through Rome, I found

that his pious and immaculate holiness was holding a Consistory, in which, people said, he was proposing to the cardinals this knotty point, on which he had decided in his own mind already, viz., whether he should join the league against the King of France or not? I rode, moreover, with some messengers journeying from Venice; some addressed to our king from Monsieur de Commines, and some to the Venetian ambassador here."

"Could you obtain any intelligence from them?" asked De Vitry, eagerly.

"Oh yes, my lord!" said Antonio, with a laugh; "every man has a weak side somewhere, and if I can be but three days with him—as I was with these men—I have plenty of time to walk round him and find out where his weak side is. I pumped out of them all they had to tell when we were yet two days from Naples, and it amounted to this, that the Venetians joined the league some time ago; that the King of Spain is as far in as any of them; that the emperor is ready to attack the king on one side,

and Burgundy on the other; so that we may expect a pretty warm reception if we march back, and a pretty hot house if we stay here."

"By Heaven! you must tell all this to the king," said De Vitry, greatly excited. "Lorenzo, can you—but no! I will do it myself. Why should I put upon another what it is my own duty to do? Hark ye, Antonio! be with me this night at seven. I must have audience just before his *coucher*, otherwise we shall have a pack of those lazy bishops and cardinals with us. On my life, I do think the Cardinal of Rouen must have two or three pretty mistresses in Naples, he is so unwilling to leave it. Can you come, man? speak! for it is true that every loyal subject should do his best to rouse Charles from his apathy. Something must be determined speedily."

"I can, of course, my lord," replied Antonio, more gravely than usual, "if it is Signor Visconti's pleasure to spare me. I shall only have to tell Jacques Gregoire to wake me up with one bucket of water, and bring back my scattered

senses with another, for, to say sooth, I am mighty tired and somewhat stupid with riding so many hundred miles in such a hurry."

"Here, drain off the rest of the flask," said De Vitry; "there is enough there to besot a Fleming. It may bring you to life. Let us see you take a deep draught."

Antonio did not disappoint him, but saw the bottom of the vessel before he took it from his lips. As soon as he had done, however, he said, "Well, my lords, I will humbly take my leave, and wait in his antechamber, like other poor fools, till my patron comes back. I have certain little particulars for his own private ear, which —"

"About what?" asked De Vitry, gaily, resolved to pay Lorenzo back a smile he had seen upon his lips while he was reading Blanche Marie's message—"about what, Antonio. Speak out, or we shall think it treason."

"My lord, 'tis but about how much bacon the horses ate upon the road, and how much hay I consumed; how much wine they drank, and how

much water I tippled; how I fell under the wrath of a magistrate for eating raw cabbages in a man's garden when I was tied by the bridle to one of the posts thereof, and how my horse had to do penance in a white sheet for certain vices of his which shall be nameless."

The whole party laughed, and De Vitry sent the man away, commending him for a merry soul, and telling him to bid the man at the door bring up more wine. Lorenzo, however, would drink no more. There was nectar enough in Leonora's letter without wine, and he was anxious to hear all those details—those never-sufficient details—on every word of which a lover pleases to dwell.

Antonio had not been gone five minutes ere Lorenzo rose and followed. A smile came upon the faces of both his friends but De Vitry exclaimed, "Well, let those laugh who win, De Terrail: now I would give a thousand golden ducats to be just in his case."

CHAPTER XI.

THE most successful men in life are usually those who, by experience or by instinct, have learned to calculate other people's actions. It is not invariably so, although, at first sight, such ought naturally to be the result. If a man knows and sees all the paths around him clearly, surely he ought to be able to choose that which will lead him to the end he has in view.

But we always forget one element in our calculation of others, namely, self. We omit it altogether, or we do not give it its just value. Yet what an important element it is ! We may know—we may calculate, in general or in detail, what will be the course in which each man's mind will

lead him; but if we know not ourselves, we can never direct the results; for, take away the mainspring from the watch, and the cogs and wheels are idle.

However that may be, Antonio was one of the keenest and most clear-sighted men at that time in Italy, although his fortunes were still humble, and his prospects not very brilliant. It required no very deep consideration to show a man of his character that Lorenzo would be at his quarters almost as soon as himself. He therefore walked quickly, and had not waited five minutes before his young lord was in the room.

"I wish to Heaven I could help bantering," thought Antonio, as he sat expecting every minute to hear Lorenzo's foot on the stairs; "it is as well to be serious sometimes; but, on my life, the more one lives in this world the less one thinks there is anything serious in it. It is all one great farce from beginning to end, and the only people who cannot look upon it as a joke are infants who have skewers stuck into them by their nurses, men who are going to be broken on

the wheel, and young lovers. These are the folks, especially the last, who cannot understand a joke. But here he comes; I must try to be grave."

"Now, Antonio," said Lorenzo, eagerly, "let me hear all about your journey;" and then he added, with that sort of dalliance with the desired subject which youth and love are wont to show, "How long were you in getting to Florence?"

"Upon my soul, my lord, I cannot tell," replied Antonio, "unless I were to stay to calculate how many inns I stopped at, how many times my horse cast a shoe, and how often I had to go round to get out of the way of some wild beast or another. But I got there as fast as I could, be sure of that; and even then I was disappointed, for when I got to Madonna Francesca's house I found everything shut up, and nothing but an old custode so deaf that he could not distinguish between Francesca and Ghibellina, for he told me that was the street when I asked for his mistress. I made him comprehend at last by signs, and I

then found out that the whole family, servants, pages, etc., had all gone to the villa on the Bolognese road to spend the summer. There, of course, I had to go; but I put it off from the grey of the night, as it then was, till the grey of the next morning; and a fine old place it is. Don't you recollect it, signor, when we were in Florence long ago? just up in the chestnut woods on the second slope of the mountains."

Lorenzo shook his head. "Well," continued Antonio, "it is somewhat like that villa you admired close by Urbino, half castle, half palace. On one side it looks as gloomy as a prison, and on the other as gay and light as a fire-fly; and it has such a beautiful view all over the Val d'Arno, running up to San Miniato, and taking in Heaven knows how much of the country over the hills!"

"Well, well," said Lorenzo, impatiently, "I trust I shall see it ere long."

"Well, my lord, I put up my horse," continued Antonio, "and asked among the servants for the signora. All the people recollected me, and I

found she had a habit of sitting out in the garden in the early morning, just as she used to do at the Villa Rovera, which shows how people can be mistaken, for I thought she would have given up that custom when there was no person to sit with her; but they said she would sit there and think for hours."

Lorenzo smiled, for he thought that he knew of whom she was thinking, and he remembered that, even in the bustle of the march, he had passed many an hour sitting listlessly on his horse, thinking of her.

"Well, I did not find her very easily, my lord," continued Antonio, "for it is a curious labyrinth of a place—villa, and gardens, and all—but at last I caught sight of something like a white robe just in the shade of a tall old cypress tree. The beautiful lady was very flattering to me; and I am a personable sort of a man, I believe, not easily to be forgotten when once seen. But she remembered me in a minute, and started up and ran forward to meet me, crying out, 'What news—what news, Antonio? Is he safe—is he well?'"

Then she gave me her hand to kiss, and I kissed it, and put your letter into it, and then she kissed the letter; but it was a hypocritical kiss, that, for she tore it the next minute in a very barbarous manner, in order to get at the inside. Then she kissed it again and read it. Then she read it again, and she did not speak a word for nearly half an hour, but went back and picked out little bits of the letter, just as a child picks the nice bits out of a pie."

"Out upon you, Antonio!" cried Lorenzo; "here the dear girl has been showing all the warm feelings of her heart only for you to laugh at."

"Indeed, I was more like to cry, for she herself cried in the end, and the tears flowed over the long black lashes and fell upon the letter, and had I been a crying person, I must fain have wept to keep her company. It is very funny, my lord, that people cry when they are extremely happy, for I am quite certain that Donna Leonora was not crying for sorrow then, and yet she cried as if her eyes were fountains of diamonds; and

then she wiped them with her kerchief, and turned away her head and laughed, and said, 'This is very foolish, Antonio, but I have been dreaming of this letter's coming so long, and now it is so much sweeter than I thought it would be, that—' and then she forgot what she was going to say, or perhaps she never intended to say anything more; but I understand very well what she meant, for all that."

Antonio paused, but Lorenzo was not yet half satisfied. He taxed the man's memory to the utmost I am not sure he did not tax his imagination also to tell him every word, and to describe every look of Leonora. Then he made him speak of the villa; and there Antonio was quite at home, for, during the three days he had staid, nothing had escaped his attention. He knew every corner in the house, and every walk or terrace in the gardens; and a strange, wild, rambling place it must have been, the manifold intricacies of which spoke but too plainly the terrible and lawless times which existed at the

time of its construction, and which, alas! existed still.

The ruins may still be seen upon the slope of the Appenines, and many a passage and chamber may be found lighted only by the rays which can find their way through a thin plate of marble undistinguishable on the outside from the wall or rock. The light thus afforded, be it remarked, though dim, and at first hardly sufficient to guide the footsteps, is mild and pleasant, and the eye soon becomes accustomed to it.

Mona Francesca and sweet Leonora d'Orco have passed away; the walls have crumbled, and in many parts fallen; on base, and capital, and fluted column wild weeds and tangling briars have rooted themselves, but a short, smooth turf, dotted with the deep blue gentia, leads from the high road to the villa; and where several terraces once cut upon the side of the hill, may still be traced, and over which the feet of Leonora once daily walked, a thick covering of short myrtle, with its snowy stars, has sprung up, as if

fragrance and beauty rose from her very tread.

Antonio described the place as it then was, and the young lover fancied he could see the first, dearest object of his ardent nature wandering amid the cypresses which led in a long avenue from the villa to the convent higher up the hill, or seated upon the terrace looking toward Naples and counting, with the painful longing which he felt in his own heart, the long hours which had to elapse ere they could meet again.

It seemed as if Antonio's eyes could look into his heart, for just at the moment when that longing had reached its highest point, he said quietly, "I wonder, my lord, that you do not quit this French service and court, and here, in our own beautiful Italy, spend the rest of your days, when you have here large estates, and the loveliest and sweetest lady in all the world ready to give you her hand for the asking. On my life, I would take the cup of happiness when it is full. Heaven knows, if you let it pass, how empty it may be when it comes round again, if ever."

Wise, wise Antonio! you have learned early
the truth of the words of your old patron,

"Chi vuol esser lieto sia
Di doman non c'e certezza."

Lorenzo remained silent and thoughtful, and it must be owned the temptation was very strong; but he remained silent, as I have said, and the man went on. "What advantage can you, sir, gain from France? What tie binds you to follow a monarch engaged in the wildest enterprises that ever entered a vainglorious head?"

"Hush! hush! Antonio," said Visconti; "speak no ill of King Charles. Much leads me to follow him; many advantages can be reaped from France, and advantages which, for my Leonora's sake, I must not neglect. Have I not received from Charles's hands the order of chivalry? Have I not been led by him into the way of glory and renown? Has he not protected my youth, treated me with every kindness, advanced

me even above those who are superior to me in all respects?

“And would you have me share in all the glorious and successful past of his career, and leave him at a moment when clouds are gathering in the sky, and danger and difficulty menace his future course? But even were I base enough to do so, where is security, peace, justice, tranquillity to be found in this unhappy land? Were I alone in life, without bond of love, or the happiness of any other depending upon me, I might, indeed, cast myself into the struggling elements now at work in Italy—I might venture all to serve or save my country. But Leonora, what would become of her? France may meet with a reverse or a misfortune, but it can only be for a time. There is peace and security for her I love. Even here, under the banner of the king, is the only safety, the only hope of justice and security. I must not abandon one who can and will give aid and protection to all who serve him faithfully.”

“But suppose this king were to die,” said

Antonio, "where would be your security then?"

"Founded more strongly than ever," answered Lorenzo; "the Duke of Orleans is more nearly related to me than King Charles, and I have always stood high in his favour. But there is no chance of King Charles dying. He is young, healthy, and destined, I trust, to a long life and a long reign. The thought would be far more pleasant to me to take my Leonora into France, where, safe from all the dangers of this beautiful and beloved but distracted land, she might spend her days in security and peace, than to remain with her here, were all the highest prizes of ambition ready to fall into my hand. No, no, Antonio, I must not dream of such things. My lot is cast with that of the King of France, at least for the present. Perchance, ere long, the opportunity may occur of bearing my Leonora away to other lands. I cannot form plans, I cannot even judge of probabilities, where all is uncertainty and confusion; but through the mists of the present and the darkness of the future twinkles still a star

of hope, which will guide us home at last, I trust. Now go and get rest and food, Antonio. I have taxed your patience; but you would forgive me if you knew what had been the anxieties of the last few weeks and the relief of this day."

Antonio left him, and Lorenzo turned to Leonora's letter again. As he read he kissed the lines her hand had traced again and again; but they must have a place alone, as showing the character of her who wrote better than any words of mine could do.

CHAPTER XII.

LETTER OF LEONORA D'ORCO TO LORENZO VIS-
CONTI.

"It has come— it has come! Oh yes, it has come at length. Dear Lorenzo, my own Lorenzo, forgive me if I am wild with joy. How I have longed, how I have looked for this letter! longed and looked, till hope itself grew very like despair; and yet what a fool I was to expect it sooner. You would not write till you reached Naples. I knew it well; you told me so. But what a time has it seemed! Oh, those three months between the day of your departure and the day when you wrote—three *short* months,

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people would say; three long ages to me—how slowly, how heavily have they passed away!

“I believe the sun has shone and the sky been clear, and winter has gone and spring has come again, and the earth, grown weary of having no flowers, is putting out blossoms on every spray, and sprinkling the ground with gems; but every day has been a day of mist and darkness to me, a night of fear and dread.

“Consider that I knew naught of your fate—that in every siege or battle that took place my whole hopes, my whole happiness was perilled upon each stroke that fell. I could bear it, dear Lorenzo, if I were near. I could ride with you through the thickest of the fight; no weak terror, no idle cautions should keep you back, or distract your mind, or abate your daring, or paralyze your arm, were I but near to bathe your brow, or pillow your head, or soothe your pain, if you came back sick and wounded. But you were alone, with none but menials near you. In the hour of anguish or of death there was no Leonora to console, to comfort, to tend you, and,

at the last, to go hand in hand with you on high, and be your sister in a better world. This is what gave poignancy to all the sorrows of absence.

“ But why should I plead my cause with you as if you would blame my terror, or think hardly of the anxieties I have felt? I know you can understand them—I know can sympathise with them. Yes, yes, you have been apprehensive and anxious for me—I see it in every line of your letter—for me, whose days have passed without event or incident, without danger and without fear.

“ Oh, my beloved, what can be more wearisome, what can be more full of dark, dull dread than those still, eventless days, when like a prisoner in his solitary cell, our soul sits expecting the blow of fate.

“ But it has come—the dear assuaging letter has come to tell me that you are safe, that you are well, that you love me still, that your heart yearns for our meeting. It was long upon its way; but I do believe poor Antonio brought

it as fast as he could. I think he knew how I longed for its coming—how I longed for yours.

“Oh, how I long for it still, my Lorenzo; and yet there is a pleasure in having to write. I can tell you on this page—I can dare to own to you more than I could by spoken words. This paper can not see my cheek glow, nor, though cold and unsympathetic as the world, can it smile coldly at feelings it cannot comprehend. Oh yes, there are many hundred miles between us, and I dare pour out my whole heart to you. I dare tell you how much I love you; how you have become part of my happiness—of my being; how my existence is wrapped up in yours.

“When I think of that long journey together—of that journey which your noble nature made safe for me, and oh! how happy too, I thank Heaven, which has made me know a man whom I can reverence as well as love.

“Even as I write, the memory of those sweet days comes back; every act, every word, every

look is remembered. The tones that were music to me, the look that was light, are present to my eye and ear; my head rests upon your bosom; your eyes look into mine, and the burning kisses go thrilling through my veins into my heart.

“Oh come soon, Lorenzo, come and realize all our dreams; blot out this long period of anxious absence from my memory, or only leave it as a dark contrast to our bright joy. I can part with you no more, my beloved; I must go with you where you go. Nothing now opposes our union; you say my father's consent is given. Let me have the right to be with you every where whether in the city or the camp. Let me be your companion, your friend, your consolation, and you shall be my guide, my protector, my husband.

“How wildly, how madly I write! some would say how unwomanly. Let them say what they please. They who blame have never loved as we have loved—have never trusted as we trust; or else they have never

known you, and cannot comprehend how worthy you are of seeing a clear picture of Leonora's heart, how little capable of misinterpreting one word she writes, or abusing one feeling which you yourself have inspired.

"Perhaps, were you here, I could not tell you all this; my tongue might hesitate, my voice might fail me, but the same sensations would be within, and the words, unspoken, would be written in my heart.

"It is hard to come forth from our own separate world, and speak of the things of the common, every-day life. Indeed, I have nothing to tell, for I have lived in my own dear world ever since you left me; but one thing I must mention. Tell the Marquis de Vitry that I have heard from my dear cousin Blanche Marie, and she wishes to know if he wears her glove still, and what fortune it has found. She says, if he has not forgotten her, and any couriers pass by Pavia, she would fain hear of his health.

"This is the way in which I ought to write

to you, I suppose, Lorenzo; but I cannot do so; and yet, Heaven bless the dear girl, and grant that her union with De Vitry may be as happy as ours. She well deserves as much happiness as can be found on earth, for she has ever preferred others to herself. I almost feel selfish when I compare myself with her, and consider how completely your love has absorbed every thought and feeling of your

“LEONORA.”

CHAPTER XIII.

"FROM this, sire, I am of opinion," continued the Cardinal Bishop of St. Malo, after having given a long exposition of his views in regard to the state of Italy, "that it would be wise for your majesty to send some high dignitary of the Church to confer with the Pope, and endeavour to detach him from the League, of which people speak so much, and of which Monsieur de Commynes is so much afraid. His holiness can hardly be supposed to be sincerely attached to it, and will doubtless yield to some slight inducements. At the same time, I will send messengers to Monsieur de Commynes, instructing him to negotiate with the

Venetians concerning a commercial treaty and a guarantee of the coasts of Italy against the invasion of the Turks. There is nothing, to my eye, very formidable in the treaty between the Italian powers, which was fairly and openly published at the Vatican, and in which his majesty was invited to take part. It is not usual for monarchs to be asked to fight against themselves, and I cannot but believe that the objects of the confederation have been plainly and candidly stated, notwithstanding the terrors of Monsieur de Commines, who has now somewhat of the timidity of age about him."

The prelate looked round the council-board, at which were seated some of the most distinguished soldiers of France, and it was evident, from the self-satisfied features of his countenance, that he thought he had made a very effectual and convincing speech. He was destined to be much disappointed, however; for, though Montpensier and several others held their tongues, a somewhat sarcastic smile curled the lips of the old soldiers, and La Tre-

mouille probably spoke the universal sentiment, though in rather an abrupt and discourteous way.

"There spoke a priest," he said, "my lord the king; this is a council of war, I think, and though I could not probably celebrate mass as well as monseigneur here can cook a ragout, yet I think I know somewhat more of war than he does, and perhaps as much of policy. Commines is not alarmed without cause.

"But by paltering with naked facts, and you will find the case to stand thus: The most formidable league, probably, that ever was formed against a King of France, has been entered into by the Venetians, the Duke of Lombardy, all the petty princes of the North of Italy, the King of Spain, the Emperor of Germany, and the King of the Romans. All these are jealous of your majesty's conquest of Naples, and the Pope, knowing that he has given you good cause of offence, hates you because he has done you wrong, has broken his treaty with you, and fulfilled not one single promise that he made,

except giving cardinal's hats to the Bishop of St. Malo and the Archbishop of Rouen. He also has joined the league against you. There is one plain fact.

"Now for another, sire. Your enemies are in an active state of preparation. The Venetians have levied large forces, both of men-at-arms, of infantry, and of light Albanian cavalry. These Stradiotes are scouring all Lombardy. The Duke of Milan alone has a force in the field superior in numbers to any your majesty can bring against him. The houses of Este and Gonzaga are both in arms; the fleets of Genoa and Venice are both upon the sea to cut off your reinforcements, and the King of Spain is hurrying his preparations, not alone to bar your passage into France, but to attack your French dominions.

"Now, sire, it does not behove the high officers of your majesty's crown and army to risk the perdition of their monarch for an old woman's tale or a churchman's delays. What is the advice we are bound to give you? To

remain here shut up in this remote corner of Italy till your enemies gather strength every day, attack you on all sides, and sweep us up, as one of these Neapolitan fishermen sweeps up the fish in his net? Certainly not. The only course, then, is for you to return to France. Can you return by sea? It is impossible; we have no ships at hand to carry us, and if we had, there are superior fleets upon the water. By land, then, is the only way—I was going to say—still open, but I can hardly say that, for De Vitry here tells me that troops are gathering fast upon the Taro. But they are not yet in sufficient numbers to be of much account."

"But, Monsieur de la Tremouille," said the king, interrupting him, "would you have me abandon Naples, after all it has cost us to acquire it?"

"That does not follow, sire," replied La Tremouille; "You can garrison the principal strong places of this kingdom, and then, with the rest of the army, march, lance in hand, to the frontier

of France. I will undertake, upon my head, that we cut our way through if we set out at once; if we delay, God only knows what will be the result. Our junction once effected with the Duke of Orleans, we have nothing more to fear, and may then either turn upon this Ludovic the Moor and chastise his many crimes, or, gathering fresh forces in France, return to Naples, and set all our enemies at defiance. This is my advice. I know not what is the opinion of the other lords here present."

"I go with my good cousin, sire," said Montpensier: "and if it be needful, and your majesty so commands, I am ready to remain here in Naples, and do my best to keep the kingdom for you till you can return yourself or send me reinforcements."

Every member of the council, with the exception of the bitterly-mortified Cardinal of St. Malo, concurred in the views of La Tremouille.

Charles still hesitated, and ended by endeavoring to combine the advice of his minister with that of his generals. He gave orders to prepare

for immediate departure, and sent prelates to the Pope, and letters to his ambassador at Venice. The appearance of the first in Rome served to warn Alexander to fly from the approach of the French army; the receipt of the latter in Venice only served to hasten the preparations of the Venetians to oppose the king's passage. But still, with some vacillation of purpose, before the council rose he questioned De Vitry as to the nature and source of the intelligence he had received regarding the concentration of troops upon the Taro.

"I have got the man here without, sire," replied De Vitry; "shall I call him in, that your Majesty may examine him yourself?"

The king bowed his head, and a moment after Antonio was in his presence. The scene was somewhat imposing, for all the greatest men of France—those who had served their country—those who had made themselves a name in history, were present round that council-board; but I fear, Antonio's was not a very reverent nature.

It was not alone that he had but small respect for dignities, but that he had as little for what are generally considered great actions. Doughty deeds were to him but splendid follies; and he felt more reverence in the presence of a woman suckling her babe than he would have felt for Cæsar in his hour of triumph. If he was a philosopher, it was certainly of the school of the Cynics

On the present occasion he appeared before the King of France with perfect unconcern; perhaps there was a little vanity in it, for he argued, "They may know more about some things, but my mother-wit is as good as theirs, and may be better. Why should I stand in awe of men, many of whom are inferior to myself, and few superior?"

"Well, sir, tell what you know of this matter," said the king, taking it for granted that De Vitry had told him why he was brought within.

"Of what matter, sire?" asked Antonio; "I know a good deal of several matters."

"I mean of what is taking place beyond the mountains," said the king. "I thought Monsieur de Vitry had explained."

"He merely told me to come to your majesty's presence," replied Antonio. "As to what is taking place beyond the mountains, sire, there are many things I wish were not. It is now the month of May, and the prospects of the harvest are but poor. There is plenty of it, but the crop is likely to be bad —spears and bucklers instead of wheat and furrows, sire, and blood and tears instead of gentle rain and light airs."

"Be more precise, sirrah," said the Cardinal of St. Malo, sharply; "we want facts, and not any more moralizing."

"Heaven forbid that I should moralize in your eminence's presence," replied Antonio, with great gravity; "but if his majesty wishes to know what I saw on my journey from this place to Florence and back again, I will deliver it at large."

"Pray spare yourself that trouble," said De Vitry, interposing; "merely tell, and that as

briefly as possible, my good friend, what you told me just now about the state of the country, especially on the other side of the Appenines."

"Why, my lord, the people are arming all through Romagna and the Papal States," replied Antonio. "I have never seen such an arming in Italy before. There is not a small baron or a vicar of the Church who is not getting men together; and had it been known I was in the French service, I could not have passed; from which I argue that all this preparation bodes no good to France. Then, as to the other side of the mountains, I saw nothing with my own eyes. But I heard from a muleteer, who had been plundered of his packs by the Albanians, that about Fornewo and Badia there is a Venetian force of several thousand men—a thousand lances, he said, at the least, besides foot-soldiers, and that the Stradiotes were scouring the country right and left, and bringing in food and fodder to a camp they are forming near Badia on the Taro. Another told me that on the road near Piacenza he had passed a force of some five thousand men

marching towards the mountains; and the report ran that his Highness of Orleans had been stopped near Novara by a superior army, and forced to throw himself into that place."

"That accounts for there being no letter, sire," said La Tremouille.

"He surely could have found means of sending us intelligence," said Charles; "it is always customary, I believe, my lords, to send more couriers than one, and by different routes."

"No French courier could pass, sire," said Antonio; "there are barriers across the whole of Italy, whose sole business is to cut off all communication between your majesty and your French dominions."

"Then how did you pass?" exclaimed the king, somewhat irritated by the man's boldness.

"Because I can be a Frenchman when I like and an Italian when I like, may it please your majesty," replied Antonio; "this time I thought fit to be an Italian, and that saved me."

"I would fain have the man asked," said La

Tremouille, "if he knows by whom those bands are commanded, led, or instigated."

"I know nothing but by common report," replied Antonio, "and she is a stumbling jade upon whom it is not well to rest weighty matters. However, she sometimes stumbles right, and the general rumour throughout the whole country was that his eminence the Cardinal Cæsar Borgia was at the bottom of the whole. Certain it is that the men who stopped and robbed the muleteer professed themselves to be his soldiers."

"I cannot believe it," said the king; "he was wrong in leaving our camp it is true, when he had voluntarily surrendered himself as a hostage, but in all our communications he showed reverence for the crown of France, and professed respect and affection for our person."

A slight smile came upon the lips of several of the counsellors, who had learned by experience the difference between professions and realities, but no one ventured to assail the king's opinion, and shortly after Antonio was dismissed; but it was only to give place to the king's provost, who

came to report very unmistakable signs of mutiny and sedition in the city of Naples itself. From his account it appeared that even those who had been most discontented with the Arragonese princes, and had greeted most warmly the entrance of Charles into Naples, longed for the restoration of the old dynasty, and were, step by step advancing towards revolt.

"They are an ungrateful people," said Charles; "have I not freed them from taxes and burdens insupportable?"

"Yes, sire," replied bluff La Tremouille; "but I must say in their favor that if *you* have freed them, some of our good friends have burdened them sufficiently. In fact, your majesty, it has been but a change in the nature, not in the weight of the load, and the old story goes, if I recollect right, that the ass who carried the gold, found his pack quite as heavy as the ass who carried the hay."

"You are somewhat bold," replied the king with a frowning brow.

"I am, sire," replied the undaunted soldier;

"perhaps too bold, and I can crave your pardon on the plea that I am rendered bold by my zeal for your majesty's service. The people of the whole kingdom we know to be discontented at the end of three short months. Now, as your majesty has shown yourself full of the kindest and most liberal feelings towards them, this discontent can only be produced by the exactions and peculations of inferior persons. I mention it now, whatever it may produce, because I sincerely hope and trust that Naples may ever remain a dependency of the French crown; and it will be necessary that these things be examined into very closely, in order that the country may be rendered a willing and attached dependency, rather than a hot-bed of mutiny and discontent—a sore in the side of France."

"You mean well, I know," said the king rising; "let all preparations be made with speed to commence our march at the earliest possible day. Montpensier, we will confer with you privately on the defence and maintenance of the kingdom at the hour of noon—that is to say," he

continued, with a faint smile, "if you can contrive to rise so early in the morning."

Thus saying, Charles quitted the council chamber with a sad feeling of the weight and difficulty, the care and anxiety, the duty and responsibility of a crown.

CHAPTER XIV.

I am about to quote from another who knew well the facts he recorded. His name matters not, but the whole is a translation, upon my word. "The king had remaining nine hundred men-at-arms, comprising his household troops, two thousand five hundred Swiss, two thousand of the French infantry, and about fifteen hundred men fit to bear arms that followed the army. These troops formed a body of nine thousand combatants at the utmost, with whom he had to cross all Italy.

"This small army was not yet out of Naples when Ferdinand had effected his landing on the coast of Calabria, at the head of some Spanish

troops. Charles began his march on the 20th day of May, not long after his coronation. He met with no impediment on his march to Rome, from which city the Pope had fled. He passed through it, strengthened himself by the reinforcements collected from various garrisons which he had left in the strong places of the ecclesiastical states, and sacked the small town of Toscanella, which refused to receive his troops."

So far my author; but after quitting Rome, whither did Charles direct his march? First to Viterbo, thence to Sienna, and from Sienna to Pisa. Was he bending his steps to Florence? Was the long-looked-for hour coming quick to Lorenzo Visconti? Poor youth! he could not tell. His heart beat when he thought of it. He formed eager and passionate plans—he dreamed dreams of joy. He would press Leonora to an immediate union; he would carry her with him to France; he would take her to the sweet banks of the Loire, and in that old chateau he so much loved he would see melt away at least some few of those bright days of

youth which God made for happiness. Oh! the cup and the dip—the cup and the dip! How short the span that will contain many and momentous events!

The army arrived at Pisa, and every one asked his neighbour what was the direction of the next day's march. No one could tell. The morning broke, and no orders were given. The citizens of Pisa rejoiced, provided for the French soldiers as if they had been brothers, rivalled each other in showing kindness and courtesy, and lost no means in testifying that gratitude which they might well feel, or of conciliating that friendship which had already proved so valuable.

The King of France busied himself with their affairs, endeavoured to moderate between them and the Florentines, and enjoyed all the pleasures of that city in the fairest period of the year; but though every day increased his peril, he spoke not of the forward march, and never hinted an intention of visiting Florence ere his departure from Italy.

At length Lorenzo could endure suspense no longer, and craved permission to absent himself for a few days.

"They must be few indeed," said the king gravely. "If you can ride thither in one day and back in another, you can spend one day with your sweet lady, my good cousin. On the fourth we march forward for Pontremoli."

The time was very short, but still a day—an hour with Leonora was a boon not to be neglected. It was night when Lorenzo received the permission, and ere an hour was over he was on the way to Florence with a small train. The air was clear and calm, the moon was shining brightly, near the full, and the ghost-like, dreamy beauty of the white marble buildings harmonized with the lights that fell upon them. Oh fair Pisa! city of beauty, of sorrow, and of crime! Standing in thy streets and remembering thy past history, one knows not whether to admire, to grieve, or to abhor!

The word was given, the gates were opened, and the train passed out, not numerous enough

for any military expedition, yet comprising too many men, and those too well armed, for any party of mere pleasure, except in days of war and peril. Then the country between Pisa and Florence was regarded as peaceful, as those days were; but peace was a mere name in the time I speak of, and it was well known that armed parties had ravaged the adjacent districts ever since the arrival of the King of France at Pisa.

Yet how calm and tranquil was the sky, how soft and soothing the early summer air, how melodiously peaceful the song of the choristers of the night, and even the voice of the cricket on the tree or the insects in the grass! The eternal warfare of earth and all earth's denizens seemed stilled as if the universal knell awaited the coming day.

Through scenes, oh, how fair! passed on Lorenzo and his train, twelve mounted men, fully equipped and armed, and half a dozen pages and servants, and as they rode, the same feelings—varied, but yet the same—were in the bosom

of both leader and followers: a weariness of the turmoil and ever-irritating watchfulness of war, a sense of relief, a blessed sensation of repose in the quiet night's ride, and the peaceful moon, and sweet birds' song—a consciousness of calm, such as comes upon the seaman when the storm has blown out its fury, and the sky is clear, and the ocean smooth again.

The rudest man in all the train felt it, and all were silent as they rode, for few of them knew the sources of the emotions they experienced, fewer sought to analyze them, and only one was moved by passions which rendered the scenes and circumstances through which he passed accessories to the drama playing in his own heart. Lorenzo felt them all, it is true, but it was feeling without perception. The moonlight, and the trees, and the birds' song, and the glistening murmur of the river, all sank into his mind and became part of the dream in which he was living, and yet he remarked none of all these things distinctly, and gave every thought to Leonora.

"She will come with me," he thought, "she will surely come with me. What matters it that the time is short? It is not as if we were the mere acquaintances of a day. We have wandered half through Italy together; she has rested in my arms, and pillowed her head upon my bosom. She will never refuse to come, though there be but one day for decision and action. But then Mona Francesca, will she not oppose? She is one of those soft, considerate women of the world, who dress themselves at the world's eye, and regulate every look by rule. She cannot feel as we feel, and will think it easy for me to return a few months hence and claim my bride with all due ceremony—a few months, and a few months! Why life might slip away, and Leonora never be mine. The present only is ours in this fleeting world of change, and we must not let it fly from us unimproved. Yet Mona Francesca will certainly oppose. At all events, she will wish to consult some one, to shield herself under the opinions of others from the world's comments. On Leonora

only can I rely; and on her must I rely alone. Here, Antonio, ride up beside me here: I wish to speak with you."

The man rode up, and Lorenzo questioned him much and often. He asked if there were not a church near the villa, and what he knew, if he knew anything, of the priest.

"There is a church some two miles off in the valley," said Antonio, "but I never saw the priest. The servants told me, however, he was a severe man, who exacted every due to the uttermost."

That was not the man for Lorenzo's purpose; and he paused and waited, and then propounded other questions, to which he received answers not much more satisfactory. At length Antonio exclaimed, with a laugh, "Tell me, my lord, what is it you want with a priest, and it shall go hard but your poor Antonio will find means to gratify you. You cannot want to confess, methinks; since you confessed last, or you must have sinned somewhat cunningly for me not to find you out."

"See here, Antonio," replied Lorenzo; "I must be back on the day after to-morrow at Pisa. Now, in a word, the Signora d'Orco must be mine ere I depart."

"Oh, then, my lord, take her home with you," said Antonio, with some feeling. "If your absence now has caused her such pain when you are but lovers, think how she would pine, poor lady, if you were so long absent from your wife."

"Such is my intention, Antonio," answered Lorenzo. "When I meet her again, I can part with her no more; but here is the difficulty: Mona Francesca will oppose our hasty union. It must, therefore, be private. Once mine by the bonds of the Church, and with her father's full consent, which I have in writing, no opposition can avail. She is mine beyond all power to separate us—she is mine, and for ever. Mona Francesca must perforce consent to her going with me to France, and, indeed, if she did not her opposition would be vain."

"I wish you had brought more men with you,

my lord;" replied Antonio, " but that is neither here nor there. As we have begun, so we must go on. Then, next, as to a priest, which is now, I suppose, the all-important question. First, we must find one who is willing; next, we must find one who is sure; and, thirdly, we must find one who is dexterous. Give me but two hours, and I think I can make sure of the man. When I was telling you all about the Villa Morelli, I mentioned that there was a monastery just above, not a quarter of a mile up the mountain. You did not take much notice of what I said, for you did not know how serviceable it might be. Oh, my lord, you cannot imagine how useful convents and monasteries are on various occasions, nor what various sorts of men can be found within them. Now there are always many who have taken priest's orders, and in this monastery there is one, at least, qualified in every way to celebrate matrimony, or anything else you like. He is Madonna Francesca's director, and therefore must be a holy and devout man."

There was a slight touch of sarcasm in
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Antonio's tone, but that did not prevent Lorenzo from presenting the very reasonable objection that he was the last man who ought to be asked to perform the marriage ceremony of Mona Francesca's temporary ward without her knowledge and consent.

"My good lord is not much acquainted with priests and friars," said Antonio; "but just as certain as Monseigneur Breconnel steals the king's money just when his majesty has most need of it himself, so will Fra Benevole marry you to the signora, and help to keep Madonna Francesca quiet and ignorant till all is over. Why, I have drunk more than one bottle with him; and for a sufficient sum—for the benefit of the monastery—always for the benefit of the monastery, you know—he will either give Mona Francesca such a penance for all the sins she has even wished to commit as will keep her in her own chamber all day, or he will drug her little cup of vino di Monte Capello, which she takes every morning, so as to make her sleep for four-and-twenty hours, or he will poison her outright

and save you all further trouble about her, just as your lordship likes," and Antonio touched his cap with solemn irony.

"The two latter alternatives are rather too strong for my taste, Antonio," replied Lorenzo, "but the first will do well enough, if you can depend upon your boon companion!"

"We can make him reliable, sir," said Antonio; "that depends entirely upon the ducats; Faith is a very good thing when it is of the right sort; but the only faith that is good is faith in God and the blessed Virgin. Faith in man must be tied with gold, and then it may hold fast. What am I to promise him if he perform the marriage ceremony in the chapel of the villa, between you and the signorina sometime to-morrow, and contrive the means?"

"Why, Cynic, he will demand the money in hand," said his young master. "Why should he trust to your faith if you will not trust to his?"

"We will both trust half way, my lord," replied Antonio, "and then it will be the interest

of neither to deceive the other. If you please, we will give him half the money for his promise, and the other half after his performance. He shall have one moiety when he says he will do it; and the other when he gives you, under his own hand, the certificate of the marriage. What do you think he ought to have?"

"Whatever he asks," replied Lorenzo; "a couple of hundred ducats."

"Oh! the extravagance of youth!" exclaimed Antonio; "he would poinard his own father for a quarter of that sum. If I understand you right I am to offer him any thing he seeks under two hundred ducats."

"Nay, I placed not that limit absolutely, my good friend," answered the youth; "the truth is, Antonio, this marriage must take place at once. I will not leave my Leonora again, and now she can only go with me as my wife. Whatever he asks he must have. I have about five hundred ducats with me, and he can surely trust my word for more, should it be necessary."

"Heaven forgive us!" exclaimed Antonio;

"you are almost blasphemous, sir, to suppose that a priest of the Catholic Church would set such a price upon matrimony when he charges so little for any other sin you please to mention. I will arrange the matter for you easily now I know how far you will go. You have no mind, perhaps, to have any cardinal assassinated, or any rich lord put out of the way, for I dare say I could get it done gratis, as a sort of make-weight, when your lordship is so liberal about matrimony! But look upon that matter as all arranged. You have nothing to do but prepare the lady and obtain her consent, and I will let you know, within four hours after we arrive, the when, and the where, and the how."

"You have but a sad opinion of the clergy of your own country, my good Antonio," said Lorenzo, with a mind greatly relieved by his companion's promises.

"On my life, it is not of the clergy alone I have such a favorable opinion," replied Antonio, laughing; "from prince to peasant it is all the same

thing, only the clergy have the best opportunities. Look at our friend Ludovic of Milan; look at your friend Cardinal Cæsar; Pope, prince, lawyer, doctor, friar, it is all the same thing. We have got into a few trifling bad habits here in Italy, what between Guelphs and Ghibelines, popes and emperors. Those who dare not draw a sword, unsheath a dagger; and those who wish not to spill blood, because people say it leaves a mark behind it, use poison, which leaves none. Buondoni, who came near killing you, was, I do believe, one of the best of all the rascals in Italy. He was always ready to peril his own life, and rather preferred it. Why, he could have had you put out of the way by something dropped into a cup of wine or scattered on a bunch of grapes for half a sequin."

"What! in the Villa Roverà?" asked Lorenzo, in a tone of doubt.

"It might have been difficult there, it is true," replied Antonio, "and perhaps Ludovic was in a hurry; otherwise he would have had it performed,

as they call it, anywhere on your journey, for less than it cost Buondoni to feed his horses on the road to Milan. Death is cheap here, my lord. But let us talk of business again. I had better lighten your purse at once of a hundred ducats, that I may be prepared when we arrive to go to early mass, which I can do safely, as I have nothing on my conscience but a small trifle of matrimony, which we are told is a holy state."

Lorenzo not only gave him readily the money he required, but would fain have pressed more upon him, for he was fearful even of the least impediment occurring to frustrate or delay the execution of his plan.

Throughout the livelong night he and Antonio continued to discuss every part and particular of the scheme they had devised; not, indeed, that there was anything more of importance to be said, but Lorenzo loved to dwell upon details which gave rise to happy thoughts, and Antonio had an amiable toleration for his master's passion.

Day dawned at length, and found the party of

horsemen some five miles from the city of Florence; but their course was no longer to be pursued in that direction. Under the guidance of Antonio, they left the broad highway between Pisa and Florence, and began to ascend by a narrower and steeper path toward the villa they were seeking. It was a wild and somewhat savage region through which they now passed—beautiful, indeed, but stern in its beauty.

The sides of the Appenines in those days were covered with dense forests, which, long after, were cut down to take away their shelter from the robbers which infested them; and the oaks and chestnuts had even in some places encroached upon the road. In other spots, however, large masses of rock appeared; and in others, again, the path, having been cut along the side of the hill, displayed a grand view over the wide and beautiful valley of the Arno and the surrounding country. At the first of these gaps, where the open landscape presented itself, neither Lorenzo nor Antonio looked toward it, for both had matter of thought within which

made them somewhat indifferent to external objects. They might have even passed the second and third without notice, but one of the soldiers who followed exclaimed, "That is a good large body of men, my lord."

"Ha!" cried Lorenzo, immediately turning his eyes to the open country. "Indeed it is, Parisot. There must be full five hundred spears."

"More than that, sir," replied the man; "but they are not coming our way."

"Nor going to Florence, either," remarked Antonio. "They are no Florentine troops, Monsieur Parisot."

"I do not know what they are," said the soldier, "but I know what they are not. They are not French troops, or you would see them in better order. Why, they are riding along like a flock of Sarcelles."

"Ay, I see," said Antonio; "not half the regularity of a flock of wild geese."

"Don't you think, mylord," continued Parisot, without remarking Antonio's quiet sneer at his

boast of his countrymen's military array "don't you think they look like one of those irregular bands which we sometimes saw in the Roman States? people said they were kept up by Cardinal Borgia. They go flying about just in the same way, shifting from flank to rear—now in line, now in hedge, and now in no order at all."

"They do look like them," said Lorenzo: "but I should hardly think the cardinal would venture his men so far as this."

"Oh, my lord, you cannot tell how far he will venture," said Antonio, "especially when he is only taking the dues of the Church. He and his holy father have a right to tithes, and those bands are merely sent out to collect a tenth of all the property in Italy. But what are they doing now? Some twenty of them have gone to that pretty little villa to get a draft of water, I warrant."

"Well, let us pass on," said Lorenzo; "they do not see us up here, or they might prove troublesome fellow-travellers."

But before he could move on beyond the break in the trees from which he had been observing the cavalry in the valley below, a thin white smoke rose up from the villa, and the detachment which had ridden up to it was seen retreating towards the main body of their comrades, who had paused upon the high road. The next moment a flash of flame mingled with the smoke and then, from two of the windows, lines of fire were seen to extend along a veranda, probably of wood, which ran round three sides of the house. Another moment, and all was in flames, while indistinctly were seen several persons, apparently women, in the hands of the brutal soldiery.

Lorenzo shut his teeth close and rode on. He uttered not a word aloud, but he thought, "Oh that I had supreme power over this beautiful land, if but for a brief space of time, I would be a tyrant for the people's good—remorseless, cruel to all such fiends as these. But I would stop the crimes that make a hell of a paradise, or die."

The ascent seemed very long. Oh, how long the last portion of any journey seems when we are hastening to those we love! "Is it much farther, Antonio? is it much farther?" asked Lorenzo, repeatedly.

"Only a mile, my lord—only half a mile," replied the man. But the mile seemed a day's journey, the half mile a league.

At length the joyful words were heard, "We turn off here, signor." But still the chestnut woods hid the villa from sight; and though Lorenzo now pushed on his jaded horse fast along the more level ground they had reached, some more slow moments passed ere he came upon the smooth, free turf-ground, bedizened with flowers, which Antonio had described at the approach to the villa. It opened out at a turn of the road very suddenly, and the young knight was upon it ere he was aware. But in an instant he reined in his horse, and was still gazing forward with a look of dismay and anguish when his men came up.

There indeed stood the Villa Morelli—at least

what was left of it. There were the old towers firm and perfect externally, though the windows were cracked and broken; but the more modern edifice which was turned towards the west for the purpose of catching the full influence of the most beautiful hour of Italy, with its light graceful architecture, its richly-ornamented windows, and fairy colonnade, where was it?

Parts still stood shattered and toppling over, as if about to fall the next moment; part lay in fragments upon the terrace, and part had fallen inward, crushing the luxurious halls and splendidly-furnished chambers, while here and there a wandering wreath of smoke, and even a creeping line of fire among scorched and broken beams, told by what agency the ruin had been produced.

Old men hardened in the petrifying experience of the world, and men of iron souls created and fashioned for the sterner things of life, may be brought suddenly into the presence of such scenes, may even have personal interest in them,

without feeling more than a vague general sense of disgust and horror at those who have produced them, and the sorrow which is natural to the human mind in seeing fair things blighted, either by gradual decay or sudden accident. But Lorenzo Visconti was not one of those. There was a certain degree of firmness—even perhaps sternness in his character, it is true; but he was full of emotions, and sensitive, and very young.

There had dwelt his young bride when last he heard of her; there he had every reason to believe she had been dwelling peacefully within a few short hours. Is it wonderful that, besides all the terrible fears which rushed in an indistinct crowd through his head, a thousand wild thoughts should crowd upon his brain and seem to paralyze its functions.

Where was she now? What had become of her? Had she been carried off by the band of ruthless marauders he had seen below? Was she buried in those dreadful ruins? These and

a thousand other fearful questions were flooding his mind like the waves of a sea stirred by a hurricane.

All paused in awe-struck silence for a moment, and then Lorenzo struck his horse with the spur, and dashed on up the terrace even among the still hot fragments. "Ho! is there any one here?" he cried—"is there any one here? For the love of God, answer if there be! Ride round to the back, Antonio. Parisot, take that other way to the left. See if you can find any to answer. But be quick—be quick! there is no time to spare."

"But what would you do, my lord?" asked Antonio, in a sad tone.

"Pursue the villains to the gates of hell?" cried Lorenzo. "I will, I tell you! quick!"

More than once Lorenzo repeated the shout, "Ho! is there any one there?" while the men were absent, and sometimes he would think of sending some of the men down to a small peasant-house he saw about half a mile below, and then he would remember that he might

need them all at a moment's notice; and often would he mutter words to himself, such as "They dare not resist a French pennon. What if they do? Then die. Better to die a thousand times than live to think of her in their hands."

The few minutes the men were absent passed thus as if in a dream; but at length Antonio re-appeared, bringing a man with him pressed tightly by the arm. It was a peasant of the middle age, who seemed somewhat unwilling to come where he was led, and was evidently afraid; but, if one might judge from the expression of his face, the dull, heavy look of despair, there was sorrow mingled with his fear.

"You need not hold me so hard, signor," he said, in the rich but somewhat rough Tuscan tongue; "I will come. I only ran from you because I thought you were a party of the band."

"Here!" cried Lorenzo, springing up to meet them; "tell me who has done this. What of

the ladies who were here? Where are they? What has become of them? Speak, man, quick! I am half mad."

"Oh, signor, if you had seen your daughter carried away by ruffians you might be whole mad," answered the peasant, and his eyes gushed forth with tears.

"I am sorry for you from my heart," replied Lorenzo, in an altered tone; "yet, my good friend, give me any information in your power. My bride may be where your daughter is, and if so I will pursue them."

The man gave a hopeless, nay, almost a contemptuous look at the handful of men which followed the young lord.

"Never mind," said Lorenzo, well understanding what he meant; "only tell me what you know, and leave the rest to me."

"All I know is very little, signor," replied the man. "A little before daybreak, when it was just gray, I heard a great many horses go by my house yonder, coming this way, and thinking it strange, I got up and looked after

them. I then saw it was a great band of armed men. My heart misgave me, for my poor Judita was up here helping the people at the villa. As fast as I could I crept through the vines; but of course they were a long way before me, and I found that the way to the villa was guarded. I know not how long I staid, for if it had been but a minute it would have seemed an hour, but I saw after a while a bright light in the windows of that big old tower, and then the windows of the great new hall were all in a blaze. Everything had been silent till then—at least I could not hear anything where I lay hid by that big stone, covered with the old uva Sant Angelica—but just when the glare came in the windows, there were sounds made themselves heard—cries, and shrieks, and such noises as make men's hair stand on end. Then a whole party came hurrying out, with a fine, handsome man at their head—and he was laughing too—who said to the first of those that followed, 'Put them on the horses and away. You are sure that fire has taken everywhere.'

What the other answered I do not know, for just then I caught sight of the women they were dragging out."

"Who were they?" said Lorenzo, eagerly. "It must have been day by that time. You must have seen their faces."

"I saw no one but my daughter, signor," said the poor man, simply; and after a pause he added, "and she was soon out of sight for ever. Her body will be in the Arno or the Mugnione to-morrow, and we shall be childless."

Lorenzo's head drooped, and for some moments he kept silence. There was an intensity of grief in the poor parent's tone which awed even his grief.

"Could you distinguish any of these men," he asked at length, "so as to know them again?"

"I saw nothing very clearly," replied the other—"nothing but Judita; only I know that one of the men called the other 'Monsignore.'"

He looked to me more like a devil than a cardinal, and yet he was a handsome man too."

"My lord, you can see the band from here," said one of Lorenzo's troop; "they are taking the Pisa road, They will fall in with our outposts, if they do not mind."

"Well, they must be followed, and, if possible, cut off," replied his lord, who had now recovered some presence of mind. "If they take their way toward Pisa we shall have them."

"Your pardon, my lord," said Antonio, "but will it not be better to go up to the monastery, and make inquiries there? Depend upon it, the good fathers did not stand looking on at the burning of the villa without marking all, if they did not do all they could. They had no daughters in the villa, and saw more than this poor man, depend upon it. Five minutes will take you thither. You can see one of the towers up yonder, just above the tree-tops."

"Well bethought," replied his lord; "we

may, indeed, hear tidings there. But we must not lose sight of the enemy. Parisot, ride on to the verge of the rocks there. You can see them thence for ten miles, at least, I should think. Keep good watch upon them. All the rest stay here. I will be back speedily;" and, so saying, with Antonio for a guide, he rode on.

CHAPTER XV.

How much accident sometimes serves us—nay, how often our own follies and indiscretions lead us to better results than our wisdom and prudence could have attained!

“Conduct is fate,” “Knowledge is power,” are the favourite doctrines of those who believe they have conduct, or presume they have knowledge. Carried to the infinite, both axioms are true, but in every degree below the infinite they are false; and oh, how false with man! Every abstract, indeed, is often found to be a practical falsehood. The wisest and the best of men, from Socrates to Galileo, have, by the purest conduct, won the worst of fates; and power, either to do

good or evil, slipped from the hands of Bacon just when he reached the acme of his knowledge. It seems as if God himself were pleased to rebuke continually the axioms of human vanity, and to show man that no conduct can overrule his will — no knowledge approach even to the steps of power.

It was unfortunate for Lorenzo that he had imprudently left all his men but Antonio below. There were two old monks sitting on the rocks just before the great gates of the monastery, and talking with each other earnestly. Both started and rose when they heard the sound of horses' feet; but as the place where they stood commanded a full view down the road, they could see at once that the party which approached was not formidable in point of numbers.

In troublous times men built their houses for defence as well as shelter, and the monks had found it necessary to use even as much precaution as their more mundane brethren. The monastery was well walled, and the rocks on which it stood

were fortifications in themselves; but all the skill of the builder had been expended upon the great gates, which were assailable from the road leading directly to them. Two massy towers, however, one on either side, a portcullis with its herse ready to fall on the heads of any enemies who approached too near, a deep arch behind that, with loop-holes in the dark, shadowy sides and machicolations above, and then two heavy iron-plated doors, gave sufficient defence against anything but cannon, which were not likely to be dragged up those heights.

One of the monks, as soon as he had satisfied himself of the number of the approaching party seated himself again on the rock; the other retreated a few steps as if to re-enter the building, but stopped just under the portcullis.

"What seek you, my son?" said the first, as Lorenzo rode up and drew in his rein by his side. "We are in great trouble this morning, and the prior, though unwilling to stint our vowed hospitality, has commanded that no one be admitted."

"I came to seek intelligence regarding those most dear to me, father," replied Lorenzo; "there has been a terrible act committed at the Villa Morelli down below."

"Alas! alas!" said the old man, "a terrible act indeed."

The monk at the gate had by this time drawn nearer, and was looking steadfastly at Antonio. "Why, surely," he said, "I saw you at the villa some weeks ago with the ladies Francesca and Leonora."

"Assuredly," replied Antonio; "you came down seeking Brother Benevole, and staid for an hour to hear of what was doing at Naples. It is these two ladies we are seeking. My young lord set out last night from Pisa, and we have travelled all night, for the purpose of visiting the Signora Leonora and Madonna Francesca, and when we arrive we find nothing but ruin and destruction."

"Alas! alas?" said the old monk who was seated on the rock, fixing a very keen, and Lorenzo thought, a very meaning look upon

the other friar, "alas! alas! it is very terrible."

"But can you give me any information respecting these ladies, good fathers?" asked the young lord, somewhat impetuously. "If you knew how closely I am connected with them, you would comprehend what I would give for even the slightest information regarding them."

"Alas! we can give you none, my son," answered the old man; "can we, Brother Thomas? In the gray of the morning we were disturbed by the coming of that fiend in the shape of a man, and some of us ran out when they heard the cries and saw the flames, but the prior recalled us all by the bell, and made us shut the gates and keep quite close within till the man and his company was gone."

"Of whom are you speaking, father?" asked Lorenzo, abruptly. "Whom do you call 'the man' and 'that fiend?'"

"Do you not know?" exclaimed the monk. "I mean that demon, enemy of God and

man, calling himself Cæsar, Cardinal of Borgia."

"He shall answer me for this, if it be in the Vatican!" said Lorenzo, setting his teeth hard.

"Come, Antonio, I must follow these men, and may chance to bring those upon them who will take a bloody vengeance."

"Stay a moment, my lord," whispered Antonio; "there is more to be got here—there is some news, and it may be good news, lying hid somewhere. If they saw nothing but what the good monk says, how does he know it was Don Cæsar? Let me deal with him. Good Father Sylvester," he continued aloud——

"That is not my name, my son," said the monk upon the rock. "I am called Fra Nicolo, though sometimes men call me Fra Discreto."

"Well, good Father Nicolo, then," said Antonio, "my young lord here, Signor Lorenzo Visconti, Knight, proposes to pursue yonder company of wicked men and bring upon them the whole

power of the King of France, whose cousin he is."

"He will do a good deed," said the old monk, dryly.

"But, good father, he cannot do so," said Antonio, "without food for his horses and men, and drink also. Now I will crave Fra Tomaso here to go into the prior, and tell him of our case. Ask him to speak with my young lord in person, for he has a dozen or two of men below, and as many horses, but he did not choose to approach your peaceful gates with such a force."

"Brother Thomas can do as he pleases," said the old monk, "but I don't think the prior can feed so many, especially the horses; so there is not much use of his going."

Fra Tomaso, however, thought differently, for he immediately turned to go into the convent; and Antonio, who had dismounted a moment or two before, went with him as far as the inner gate, whispering eagerly in his ear all the time. Lorenzo did not perceive that the friar answered

anything, but Antonio's face was much more cheerful when he returned than it had been after witnessing the ruin of the Villa Morelli.

The old monk who remained did not appear to have any great benevolence in his nature, or it was not excited by Lorenzo and his servant. "It is useless," he said—"all useless. There is the prior's mule; that is all we have.

"Oh, we and our horses are soon satisfied," said Antonio, in his usual tone. "We only want a little hay and water for ourselves and a little white bread and wine for our horses."

"I think you are mocking me, my son," said the monk, with a very cloudy brow. "I do not bear mocking well."

"And yet your Heavenly Master was both mocked and scourged," said Antonio, "and he uttered not a word."

How far the dispute might have gone between Antonio and Fra Discreto or Nicolo, had it remained uninterrupted much longer, it is difficult

to say, for the worthy monk was evidently waxing irate; but at that moment came, almost running forth from the gates, a portly, jovial-looking friar of some fifty-five or sixty years of age, who took Antonio in his arms, and gave him a mighty hug. "Welcome! welcome, my son!" cried Fra Benevole, for he it was; "thrice welcome at this moment, when we need better comfort than wine can give us—though, Heaven bless the Pulciano, it was the only thing that did me good at first. Now this is your young lord, I warrant, of whom you told me so much, and whom the signorina loves so well."

The very reference to Leonora's name brought down upon the jovial monk a whole host of questions, but he gave a suspicious look to the old man, who still continued to oppress the rock, and he likewise professed inability to answer. But there was something in his manner which renewed hope in the bosom of Lorenzo, though it did not remove apprehension. He had spoken of Leonora in the present tense too, not in the past, and that was something.

"But come to my cell," he cried; "come and rest, and have some light refreshment; for though I must touch nothing myself, for these three hours, I can always cater for my friends."

His face was turned toward Lorenzo as he spoke, as if the invitation was principally directed toward him, and the young nobleman answered, "I am afraid, good father, I must await the return of Fra Tomaso, who has gone to bear a message to the prior."

"Oh, Brother Thomas will know where to find you," replied Benevole. "It was he who told me of your arrival and sent me to you. He will be sure to seek you first in my cell."

But the monk's hospitable intentions were frustrated by the appearance of Tomaso himself, followed by no less dignified a person than the prior himself, a nobleman by birth and a churchman of fair reputation. Lorenzo dismounted to meet him, and their greetings were courteous, if not warm.

"I will beg you, my lord," the prior said, "to repose in my apartments for a time, while your

horses and men are cared for by the monastery. All attention shall be paid to their wants and comfort, and if you will explain to Brother Benevole where they are exactly, he will have them brought up to the strangers' lodging."

"They are down by the ruins of the villa," said Lorenzo, "and one man must remain there to watch that brutal band, for, God willing, they shall not escape punishment. But I beseech you, reverend father, give my mind some ease as to the fate—"

The prior bowed his head with graceful dignity, saying, "Of that presently, my son: let us always trust in God. As to your sentinel, neither he nor any need remain. We have a watchman in the campanile of the church. He can see farther than any one below, and will mark every thing at least as well. I lead the way."

Lorenzo followed, leaving Antonio with his friend Benevole and the horses, and the prior conducted him through a wide court, past the church, and through the cloister-court to a suit of apartments which spoke more the habits of a

somewhat luxurious literary man than a severe ecclesiastic.

"These are, by right," said the prior, "the apartments of the abbot; but an election, as it is called, has not been held for some years, and may not, perhaps, till a new Pope blesses the Church. Pray be seated, my lord. I see you are impatient," he added, closing the door, and looking round to assure himself that what he said could not be overheard. "Set your mind at rest. She for whom I know you feel the deepest interest has not been injured."

"But is she free? Have not those men carried her off, as they did others?" exclaimed Lorenzo, in as much impatience as ever.

"She is safe—she is in no danger," replied the prior; "let that suffice you for the present. If you proposed to follow those daring, wicked men to rescue her from their hands, the attempt would have been madness and without object, for she is not with them."

"Let me be sure that we speak of the same person," said Lorenzo, still unsatisfied.

"Of the Signorina Leonora d'Orco," replied the monk.

"Thank God! oh, thank God!" exclaimed Lorenzo, with a deep sigh. "And Mona Francesca?" he asked, after a pause; "you have said nothing of her fate, reverend father."

"Alas! my son," replied the prior, "her fate has been perhaps less happy, perhaps more so than that of her younger and fairer companion. It will be as God's grace is granted to her. Let us speak no more of this. Have you any thing else to ask?"

"Simply this," replied Lorenzo; "you are doubtless aware, father, as you seem to have full knowledge of my relations with the Signora d'Orco, that she is my promised wife, with the full consent of her father and the blessing of the good Cardinal Julian de Rovera. It is absolutely necessary that I should see her, and see her speedily, as I am obliged to rejoin his majesty of France at an early hour to-morrow."

"I fear, my son, that is not possible," said the prior; but the door opened to admit some of the

servitori of the monastery bearing more than one kind of food and wine, and the good monk stopped suddenly in his reply. As soon as the refreshments had been spread on a small stone table, and the room was again clear, he pressed Lorenzo to take some meat and wine, saying, "I can speak to you while you eat, my son."

Lorenzo seated himself at the table, and, before he ate anything, filled the large silver goblet with wine and drank it off. The mind was more depressed by anxiety than the body by fatigue. The monk watched him; for, removed as he was from much active participation in the world's affairs, he had long been a spectator of the great tragedy of human life, and comprehended at once by slight indications what was passing in the shadow of the bosoms around him.

"I fear it is impossible, my son," he said, "that you should see the lady so speedily as you wish. I can communicate with her, it is true, and can procure for you, under her own hand assurance which you cannot doubt that she is,

as I have told you, safe and well; but more I cannot promise."

"Father, I do not doubt you," said Lorenzo, ceasing from his meal before more than one mouthful had been tasted. "You would not deceive me, I am sure; but you cannot tell what I feel—you cannot comprehend what I endure, and shall endure till I see her again—till I can clasp her to my heart, and, after she has escaped such a peril, thank God, with her, for her preservation. In your blessed exemption from the passions as well as the cares of secular life, you cannot even imagine the eager, the burning desire I feel to see her, to touch her hand, to assure myself by every sense that she is safe—that she is mine. Could you conceive it, you would find or force a way to bring me to her presence ere I depart for France."

"My son, you are mistaken," said the prior, in a tone of solemn, even melancholy earnestness. "I can conceive the whole. God help us, poor sinful mortals that we are. When we renounce the world we renounce its indulgences; but can

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we, do we, renounce its passions? How many a heart beneath the cowl—ay, beneath the mitre—thrills with all the warmest impulses of man's nature! How many—how terrible are the struggles, not to subdue the unsubduable passions, but to curb and regulate them; to bring them into subjection to an ever-present sense of duty; to chasten, not to kill the most fiery portion of our immortal essence! My son, you are mistaken; I can conceive your feelings—nay, I can feel with you and for you. God forbid that, as some do, I should say these impulses, these sentiments, these sensations are unconquerable, and therefore must be indulged. On such principles let the Borgias act. But I say that we—even we churchmen—must tolerate their existence in our hearts while we refrain from their indulgence, and that thereby we retain that sympathy with our fellow-mortals which best enables us to counsel them aright under all temptations. I will do my best for you, and, if it be possible, you shall

see your Leonora for a time. When must you go hence?"

"I should set out by sun-down, father," replied Lorenzo; "the King of France must make a hasty march. Would to Heaven, indeed, it had been hastier, for the news we have is bad."

"Can you not remain behind?" said the monk; "you are an Italian and not his subject, and it might serve many an excellent purpose if you could tarry here even for a few days."

"It cannot be, father," answered the young man; "were I to follow my own will, I would remain for ever by Leonora's side, but I am bound to King Charles by every tie of gratitude and honour. Those, indeed, I fear me, I might break in any common circumstance, and trust the king would pardon me upon the excuse of love; but, father, this is a moment when I dare not, for my honour, be absent from his force. There are dangers before and all around him. A battle must be fought ere we can cut our way to France. His army is small enough, and even

one weak hand may turn the chance for or against him. I had hoped, indeed, and I will own it frankly, that my beloved girl, with her father's full sanction to our union, which she has, would have consented to be mine by a hasty marriage, and go with me to France; but, alas! I fear——"

"My son, my son," exclaimed the monk, in a reproachful tone, "you would not surely dream of taking her into such scenes of danger as you speak of: nay, that is selfish."

"Is she not in greater danger here in Tuscany!" asked Lorenzo.

"She is in none, I trust," replied the prior. "It was imprudent, beyond doubt, to come in such times as these to a defenceless villa; but in Florence she will be safe as any one can be where wrong and rapine rage as here in Italy. But what you wish is quite impossible. If you have duties that must take you hence, she has duties also that must bind her here. I will keep my promise with you: but you must give up vain wishes and purposes that cannot be executed.

She herself will tell you that it is impossible. Stay a moment; I must ask some questions."

The prior rose and left the room. He did not close the door behind him, and Lorenzo heard him give orders to some one without to go up to the belfry and ascertain if any thing could still be seen of the party who had burned the villa. That done, he rejoined his young guest, but did not renew the conversation, merely pressing him to eat. In a few moments a good fat monk rolled into the room, and announced that the party of the Borgias were still in sight.

"They have halted, and seem regaling themselves in the gardens of the Villa Morone," he said; "but I see—at least I think I see, and so does Brother Luigi—that there are movements taking place about the gates of the city, and if they stay much longer the signoria will most likely send out troops to drive them hence."

"Let them be watched well, good father, I beseech you," exclaimed Lorenzo; "for if the

Florentine troops come forth to attack them, I will go down to help."

"What an appetite have some men for fighting!" said the prior, making the monk a sign to depart; "but, my son, you will be better here. Though our gates and walls may set them at defiance, I do believe; yet to know that we have some men whose trade is war within might save us from attack. Now, my son, will you sit here and read, or go with me to our church and hear high mass? The latter I would counsel, if your mind be in a fitting state; if not, I never wish any one to attend the offices of religion with wandering thoughts and inattentive ears."

"I will go with you, father," said the young knight. "I have much to be thankful for, although some hopes may be disappointed; and my thoughts, I trust, will not wander from my God when I have most cause to praise Him for sparing to me still the most valuable of all the blessings he has given me. But is it really the

hour for high-mass? How the time flies from us!"

"It wants but a few minutes," said the prior. "Time does fly quickly to all and every one; but it is only towards the close of life we really feel how quickly it has flown. Then—then, my son, we know the value of the treasures we have cast away neglected. Come, I will show you the way. At the church door I must leave you, and perhaps may not see you again for several hours; but you can find your way back here and read or think, if the curiosity of our good brethren be too great for your patience."

"But you promised," said Lorenzo, eagerly, "that I should see the Signora Leonora for a time."

"If it be possible," replied the monk; "such was the tenor of my promise, and it shall not be forgotten. I think it will be possible," he added, seeing a shade of disappointment, or, rather, of anxiety, upon Lorenzo's brow; "but the continued presence of those bad men in the valley scares

away from us those we most need at the present moment."

He explained himself no further, but led the way onward to the church.

It cannot perhaps be said that the attention of the young nobleman was not sometimes diverted from the office in which he came to take part; but there was a soothing influence in the music, and a still more comforting balm in the very act of prayer. They who reject religion little know the strength and the consolation, the vigor and the assurance which is derived even from the acknowledgment of our dependence upon a Being whom we know to be all-powerful, and all-good—how we can dare all, and endure all, and feel comfort in all when we raise our hearts in faith to Him who can do all for us. How often in the course of each man's life has he to say—and oh! with what different feelings and in what different circumstances is it said—"Help, Lord, I sink!" Nor is it ever said without some consolation; nor is it ever asked but it is granted—ay, some help is granted, either in

strength, or in resolution, or in patience, or in deliverance. The fearful exclamation might show some want of faith in him who had been eye-witness to a thousand miracles, but with us it shows some faith also. We call upon whom we know to be able to help, and in the hour of adversity or the moment of peril we remember the Lord our God, and put our last, best trust in Him.

END OF VOL II.



